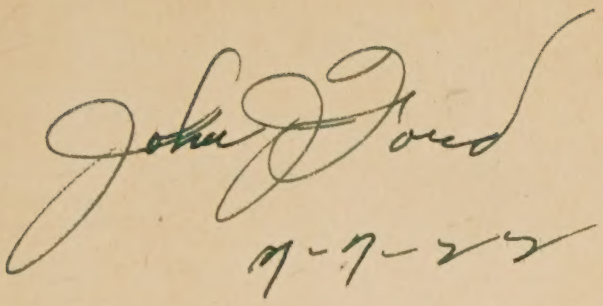
THE MYSTERY OF THE SILVER DAGGER

RANDALL PARRISH

#12



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/mysteryofsilverd0000rand

The Mystery Of The Silver Dagger

By RANDALL PARRISH

Author of
"When Wilderness Was King," "The Strange Case of Cavendish," "The Devil's Own," Etc.

A. L. BURT COMPANY
Publishers New York

Published by arrangement with George H. Doran Company

COPYRIGHT, 1920,
BY GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

COPYRIGHT, 1920, BY STORY-PRESS CORPORATION
(EASY MONEY)

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	The Message in the Box	9
II	End of a Blind Alley	16
III	A Man and a Woman	24
IV	On the Right Trail	33
V	Within the Factory Walls	41
VI	A Sport of Fate	49
VII	I Become a Well-known Thief	56
VIII	A Little Overheard	65
IX	A Strange Appointment	75
X	Harris Tells His Story	82
XI	The Plans of a Thief	90
XII	The Deserted Automobile	100
XIII	I Seek Miss Conrad	107
XIV	The Threads Become Tangled	116
XV	A Friend at the McAlpin	126
XVI	The Dagger Hat-pin	136
XVII	Perond's Café	145
XVIII	Again the Mystery	156
XIX	The Proof of Murder	166
XX	In the Jaws of a Trap	174
XXI	The Back Room at Costigan's	184

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXII	A Venture of Peril	191
XXIII	Another Prisoner	200
XXIV	At the Foot of the Stairs	209
XXV	Out of Darkness, a Clue	218
XXVI	In the Colmar Building	227
XXVII	Gaspar Wine—Investments	237
XXVIII	A Quarrel Between Thieves	247
XXIX	The Death of a Murderer	257
XXX	The Private Secretary	265

THE MYSTERY OF THE SILVER DAGGER

THE MYSTERY OF THE SILVER DAGGER

CHAPTER I: THE MESSAGE IN THE BOX

ANTICIPATING the possibility of my train arriving late, I had named the hour of meeting with Cummings as three o'clock and, in consequence of our reaching the city exactly on time, was compelled to loiter idly about the hotel for an hour. However, in passing through the corridor my attention was attracted by an unique curiosity shop occupying a small side room, and, merely to pass the time pleasantly, I entered and began examining the strange collection of wares on display.

I have always had a hobby for curios of all kinds, and having lived many years abroad in the consular service, with a passion for visiting new regions whenever possible, my collection is rather valuable, quite filling, indeed, two large rooms in the old-fashioned home left as part of my inheritance at my father's death. A glance about told me that this particular hotel curio shop, while not extensive, was evidently operated by one knowing the value of such things, and I began examining the stock exposed for sale, with

awakening interest. The proprietor joined me, but discovering that I was merely curious, permitted me to prowl about among the cases undisturbed, although remaining within easy reach should anything particularly attract my attention.

There were several articles I lingered over, tempted to purchase, but drifted on, rather undecided, until my eyes perceived a very quaint lacquered jewel box, entirely different from anything of its kind ever noted before. It was evidently old, but of a class of workmanship quite unique. Indeed as I looked at it, endeavoring to trace the markings on its silvered front, I could not determine whether it had originated in Orient or Occident; seemingly it combined features of both schools, uniting the peculiarities of each. The proprietor perceiving my interest joined me.

"The jewel box attracts you," he said pleasantly, opening the case and bringing it forth. "And the closer you examine the work the more you will appreciate the design. You have love for such things?"

"A deep interest at least," I admitted, taking the article from his hand, "a collector in an amateur way."

"You have traveled no doubt?"

"Rather extensively; much of my collection has been gathered from foreign shops; but I confess this puzzles me. What is the workmanship—surely not Japanese?"

"No," smilingly. "Although positively I cannot answer as to its origin. I studied it for days, and even now can only make an intelligent guess. The inscription, which can only be read with a microscope," he

traced the line with his finger, "is ancient Arabic, but no wild Arab ever did the lacquer."

"Who then?"

"My decision would be a Spanish Moor, a wondrous workman. There were such artisans, rare geniuses, indeed, for I have seen other specimens of their skill."

I turned the box over, whirling the gold key in the lock, and glancing inside.

"Yet so strange a curio must have a history, an imaginary one, at least. What is the story?"

"Positively none," he admitted regretfully. "Perhaps I am a poor salesman to admit this, but the fact is, this article was found by a chambermaid in one of the hotel rooms, and turned it in to the manager. He made every effort to trace the guests, only to learn that they, two men, by the way, had registered falsely. He even advertised, but with no response, and finally, after thirty days, was persuaded to accept my offer for the article. No doubt there is a story, and an interesting one, connected with this box, but this is as far as my knowledge goes."

"You are too honest for your business."

"Quite probable, yet I have found frankness to pay in the long run."

"You have put a price on this?"

"Yes, ridiculously low, no doubt, yet bringing me a good profit. The fact is, strange as the workmanship is, only a few collectors appreciate it. You are only the second to show particular interest."

He named a price, and, still with the box in my hands, I yielded to the temptation, and bought it. The

article was sufficiently small to find lodgment in an overcoat pocket, and, as Cummings appeared a little later, was soon forgotten in the earnestness of our conversation. The occasion of our conference being merely a matter of business, has no direct bearing on this story, and consequently does not need to be dwelt upon, but we later had dinner together, and attended the theater in company, my mind so occupied with other matters that I scarcely once thought of the strange purchase I had made, which remained securely hidden. It was only after returning to my own room, then nearing midnight, that it was again recalled to memory.

Only an idle curiosity, and a feeling of sleeplessness, induced me to draw the article forth, and remove its wrappings, but the sight served immediately to increase my interest. It was certainly a wonderful find, artistically beautiful, and most unusual in design. It rested open on the writing desk, under the full glare of the electric light, its strange workmanship exposed to scrutiny. There was a mystery that must have exercised a strange spell over my imagination, for I dreamed of the long, dead workman who fashioned it, forgetful of the passing night hours. A clock somewhere in the neighborhood struck, and I counted twelve, arousing myself. Perhaps I was already half sleeping, for as I turned to rise, my sleeve struck the box at the edge of the table, and before I could prevent the fall, it lay upon the floor at my feet.

There was no crash, no clatter, the thick carpet deadening the sound, but, as I stooped hastily to re-

cover the overturned box, I was astounded to discover the bottom slipped partially aside, as though some secret spring had been touched, revealing so narrow a receptacle that the ordinary eye would never suspect the possibility of its existence. Closely as I had examined previously, no conception of any such secret hiding-place had so much as occurred to me, yet now I could not doubt the evidence of my own eyes. Not only was there a false bottom, but the opening revealed a closely-folded paper. I grasped this quickly, a thrill running through me. What ancient, and long-buried message, was about to be unfolded? What work from the dead sought revealment?

But no! This was plainly modern—a clean, white sheet, no folded parchment of old, but some mystery of yesterday. I spread it out, pressing down the unsoiled creases. There was writing there, in Spanish, so faintly traced I could barely decipher the words, yet clearly revealed as of this day and generation. I know Spanish fairly well, having had a year in Mexico City, yet it required some time before I could puzzle out the message on this sheet. Even when I had carefully written down the translation into English all was not clear to my understanding —yet there was sufficient to awaken both curiosity and fear. The paper had been torn, seemingly sundered from a much longer letter, and preserved merely because of the specific address and instructions it contained. Beyond doubt all else had been destroyed. What remained may have been sufficient guidance to the party who had the benefit of what went before

in the original epistle, but was obscure to any one else. Probably it had been preserved with this certainty—that, if discovered, it would be worthless without a key to unravel its mystery. Yet it was modern, something relating to this very time, a menace; something to be grasped and understood. This conviction absolutely gripped me. I stared at the rather sinister words, blindly groping at what lay hidden behind them, instinctively scenting a conspiracy of evil which I could not determine. All unintentioned I had stumbled into a clew which might lead to startling results, yet it seemingly gave me no hint of who was involved, or of its real nature. I put the words together, weighing each one with care as to its exact meaning, and read them over with increased bewilderment. The torn fragment began, and ended abruptly; I could only guess at its meaning, yet the impression left upon my mind was both sinister and menacing. I wanted to know more.

"108 sailed Saturday from Stockholm. Will deposit letter of Credit with Krantz to your order. Amount ample all needs. See to this at once, and advise 876 Gans, so as to be no delay. Two raps, three—Cervantes. Waldron favors action this month; suggest Watonia. Can you be ready? Use South A code."

That this letter was authentic I had no doubt. Otherwise it would never have been preserved, and hidden in the false bottom of the box. Beyond question this fragment of a letter had been torn off and

preserved because of its definite instructions. Nor was its meaning altogether obscure in the light of certain events. Several illusions were familiar to me and these were what caused my earlier suspicions to crystallize into probability. It bore all the earmarks of a plot, a revolutionary plot, and one not yet brought to consummation. To be sure the note was undated, and the box had been left at the hotel thirty days before. Yet the *Watonia* was certainly the name of a ship and to my memory suggested central American trade. This did not necessarily imply that the conspirators had abandoned their purpose. More likely they were not quite ready in time to operate on the sailing date of that particular ship. Some delay had occurred, and, possibly, even now, prompt action might overturn all their plans. I sat a long while, staring at the letter, raking my memory, in determination to miss nothing, and becoming more and more firmly convinced that I was on the right track. Then I undressed, and went to bed, but not to sleep, for the darkness brought new thoughts and suggestions for the morrow.

CHAPTER II: END OF A BLIND ALLEY

I WAS still in Government employ, although unassigned, and felt this discovery to be a direct call upon my service. While my first inclination should naturally have been to turn the whole matter over to the proper bureau for investigation, two facts led me in another direction—I was sufficiently young to seek adventure, and I desired to verify my suspicions before creating any false alarm.

As I rested there, sleepless, staring up at the black ceiling, the words of the strange fragment of letter remained vividly before me. I began to analyze them, and plan the operations of the next day. There was no reason why I should immediately leave the city; indeed I could not think of doing so until I had probed deeper into this mystery. It began to fascinate me; to grow more and more important; to dominate my mind. Little by little I dug at the truth, coming finally to this conclusion. "108" was, no doubt, the recognized number of some agent who had been dispatched to America on a special errand to the conspirators in this country. He had sailed Saturday, a month ago, or more, and must have long since arrived at some port, bringing with him instructions not to be intrusted to the mail, and sufficient money, in form of Letter of Credit, with which to finance whatever nefarious scheme of revolution might be contem-

plated. This money was to be paid out to the authorized party through a man named Krantz. Who was Krantz? There was a well-known banking firm, Kulb, Krantz & Company, in Wall Street, and it was quite probable these might prove the ones involved, although to my knowledge they had no outward junta connections of this nature. However, no firm having International financial dealings could be entirely beyond suspicion under the circumstances. "Gans" was evidently a street, although I could recall none bearing so peculiar appellation, while the pass-word was in itself proof almost positive as to the South or Central American sympathies of the conspirators. If not, it was yet further evidenced by the instructions to use the South A code in case any message had to be sent by wireless.

These facts were fairly clear as I thus weaved them together, but they were rendered more damning by the other name mentioned—Waldron. If this was Ivan Waldron, I had good reason to know the fellow, and to connect his activities with any scheme destined to embarrass the government. He was not of South American stock, to be sure, nor had I previously heard of his being in company connected with revolutionary propaganda, but he was a professional agitator of the most pronounced type, a socialist radical, who in the past had openly advocated opposition to all law and order. Moreover, the fellow had a large and desperate following, to whom he was a High-Priest. I had met him twice, and realized that he would hesitate at nothing to achieve whatever end he had in

view. I recalled him clearly—a tall, thin, bony man, with deep-sunken eyes, and a strange personal magnetism which won him converts. As a speaker to those of his own class he was irresistible, and if he was engaged in this work he would command plenty of followers. He was reported to be a Russian by birth, but spoke English without an accent, and I felt no doubt but what a sufficient amount of money would engage his interest in any desperate cause. If this man was the Ivan Waldron I suspected, we had an unscrupulous antagonist, capable of any crime, with which to contend. Yet the desire to "get him" only added zest to my interest in the affair. If he was actually at the head of these fellows, these plotters against the neutrality of the United States, the catch would be worth while.

Late as I dropped asleep, haunted to the last moment of wakefulness by these thoughts, I aroused early, and with plans fully matured for immediate action. At the breakfast table this determination was strengthened by noting among the columns of the morning paper that a freighter, the *Lancashire,* had returned to her dock somewhat damaged by the explosion of a bomb in the coal-bunkers, and was found to be laden with war munitions for Brazil. While nothing definite was hinted at in the report, I at once naturally connected this shipment with the fragment of letter in my possession. If this particular gang was not responsible, they were certainly planning something of a similar nature, which might prove far more disastrous.

As soon as possible I sought out Burke, the manager of the hotel, with whom I had a speaking acquaintance, and, without confiding the extent of my discovery, questioned him relative to the mysterious box, and the guests who left it behind. His memory of the incident was clear enough, and he took trouble to verify the date by reference to the hotel books. Two men, both well dressed, but with nothing particularly to distinguish them, had registered together late in the afternoon of Friday, September 27th, and, on request, had been assigned to one room with twin beds and a bath. The room given them was known as E. 37. The larger man, who had inscribed himself as "P. S. Horner, Detroit," alone had a bag; his companion, known to the hotel as "Gustave Alva, Toledo, Ohio," being without baggage. Neither man made any deep impression on the hotel employees, and descriptions were extremely vague as to their personal appearances. The bill was paid the next morning by Horner, and the two departed together. It was an hour later when the chambermaid on that floor reported finding the box in the room vacated. After holding it for a day or two in expectation that it might be called for, no such inquiries being made, the hotel endeavored to trace the men, but to no avail. A P. S. Horner was located in Detroit, but easily proved he was not the person sought, while no Gustave Alva was to be discovered in Toledo. The fellows had either falsely registered, or were entirely unknown where they claimed residence. The first was the most probable condition. After thirty days, and

having exhausted all reasonable efforts to find the rightful owner, the hotel felt legally justified in selling the trinket. That was all Burke knew of the matter, and his interest in it was not keen. It was to him quite a commonplace.

I talked with the bell-boy who had taken them to the room, but his recollections were extremely hazy as to their personal appearance—the big man gave him a quarter, and had a black mustache, and seemed foreign; that was about as far as his memory extended. The chambermaid had no glimpse of either one of the fellows. My investigations thus far were practically barren of results.

What step to take next was a problem. I am inclined to think now that I went at the problem without much system, and that any success achieved was through pure accident. During the forenoon I dropped in upon Clement Breckinridge, Cashier of the Dover's National Bank. We had been classmates at college, and I generally called on him when in the city. This time I led the conversation to Kulb, Krantz & Company, on the pretense that I had received mail from them relative to some recommended investment. Clement knew Krantz well and favorably, and my probing elicited the information that the man was Austrian by birth, but a naturalized citizen, rather deeply interested in political matters. Since the outbreak of war he had strongly advocated neutrality, even going to Washington on several occasions to impress his views on various members of Congress. If his sympathies were at all revolutionary he had care-

fully refrained from any such open expression. The firm had made a specialty of handling South American business, and had intimate financial connections in both Rio and Buenos Ayres. The company ranked high in financial circles.

"The present war must have cost them a rather heavy loss," I hazarded.

"No doubt of that," Breckenridge admitted, "but only temporarily. In my judgment, Adolph Krantz is not the kind of man whose patriotism would be swayed by the loss of a few dollars. In fact he could drop a million, and scarcely miss it."

"Those are the very ones who suffer the most. However, this is nothing to me. By the way, Clement, do you chance to know of a Gans Street in this town?"

"Gans? That is a new one on me. Try the city directory—there on the edge of the desk."

The name was not to be found, nor any other approaching it in sound or spelling, and I finally drifted out onto the street, really no wiser than when I first entered. My morning had been a total failure, and all my planning of the evening before had come to naught. I made one more effort, however, telephoning to a detective Sergeant whom I knew well, as to the present whereabouts of Ivan Waldron. He had not heard of the man for several weeks, but promised to inquire and let me know. He got me on the wire at the hotel an hour later—the last heard of Waldron, he was in West Virginia, speaking to striking miners;

that was less than a week ago; he had not been seen in the city since.

The whole affair looked hopeless. Every clew had failed, and I could figure out no other opening. I could not persuade myself that the fragment of letter was a fake, yet it contained so little information as to yield me no point from which to start an investigation. I sat in the room alone, thinking it all over, but finding nothing to encourage me to any further effort. About all I could do would be to send the torn note to the proper authorities in Washington, with a statement of how it came into my possession, and let them dispose of the matter in any way they deemed best. I wrote such a letter carefully on hotel stationery, and went down to mail it in the lobby. Before depositing it in the mail-box I encountered the manager, Burke, and stopped for a word. We were still talking when a bell-boy came up hurriedly with a message. Burke turned.

"What is it, George?"

"That Gans Street party is on the wire, sir."

"Oh, all right. Excuse me, Severn, but I've been trying to get connection for an hour."

"But wait a minute," my veins tingling. "Did he say Gans Street? Where is that? There is no such name in the city directory."

"Gans! Why over in Jersey. Yes, I'm coming."

I thrust the unmailed letter into my pocket, and sat down, staring at the crowd in the lobby, but entirely indifferent to their presence. Here at least was an opening, a chance—Gans Street was in Jersey City.

Then it was not all a dream. I would at least look over the ground before I gave up in despair, for I had stumbled upon a way out of the blind alley—Gans Street, Jersey City.

CHAPTER III: A MAN AND A WOMAN

IT was late in the afternoon, the day dark, with a chilly wind blowing off the river, when I reached Jersey City. The first policeman encountered gave me all necessary directions, so that I alighted from a street car within a block of my destination. This was not a part of the city I had ever had occasion to visit before, being largely devoted to small manufacturing plants, with very ordinary workingmen's houses in between, and along the side-streets. Gans Street had been paved at one time, but was already badly guttered by heavy traffic, and inexpressibly dirty.

I walked up a block, and back, before I was able to determine definitely the number I was seeking, not feeling it best to question the few parties I passed on the way. A saloon on the upper corner of the block furnished me the necessary clew, and, using it as a marker, I succeeded in tracing back until satisfied I had thus safely located "876." It was an abandoned factory, built of brick, two stories high, evidently extending over considerable ground at the rear, but with a frontage not to exceed forty feet. The lower windows were boarded up, a number of those in the second story broken, and the main entrance, large enough for the passage of a motor truck, was

tightly secured by an immense iron bar. A smaller door to the right alone offered any possibility of entrance, although it was tightly closed.

To all outward appearances the place had been unoccupied for months, and perhaps years. It was exceedingly dirty and disreputable, a mere vacant shell. I surveyed the place from both sides, but gained no information. A lumber yard abutted it on the left, while a small vacant lot, grown up to weeds, was at the right, with a corrugated iron garage beyond. From the sidewalk it was impossible to gain any glimpse within. Only one discovery served to convince me that I might be on the right track—that I had not been entirely deceived. A small sign, so covered with dust and dirt as to be almost unreadable, was nailed over the smaller door. In the growing dusk I was obliged to study it intently to decipher the words, but finally made them out letter by letter:

"OFFICE
ALVA MALLEABLE IRON COMPANY"

Here was a strange coincident, if nothing more, for Gustave Alva had been one of the names signed on the hotel register. Beyond doubt this old, abandoned iron foundry was his property, and what better spot could be selected in which to meet and concoct a scheme of crime? What a place to hide arms for shipment. It looked peculiarly alone in the gathering darkness, the street almost deserted, the only gleam of light a small incandescent sputtering a hundred

feet away. Whatever doubt I may have felt regarding my venture vanished in the presence of that unusual name. This was unquestionably the place named in the letter as a rendezvous; here was where the recipient of that letter was to go and receive instructions; where he was to use the mysterious raps, and the countersign "Cervantes" in order to gain admittance. The knowledge that I was actually upon the threshold of such a discovery brought with it a determination not to lose the advantage. But what could I do? What further steps might be safely taken alone?

I crossed the street, and, hidden securely in the shadow of the building opposite, studied intently the dark outline of the old factory. It exhibited not the slightest sign of life, remaining black and silent from top to bottom. However, the place might be utilized at times for secret meetings, or as a hiding place for revolutionary material, it was plainly enough deserted now. Yet within there might be found evidence that such gatherings were held there, or some clew revealed which would point the way toward a revelation as to the purpose of the conspirators. Dangerous as such an investigation might prove, the inclination to attempt a survey of the interior could not be driven from mind. It tempted me beyond resistance. However, it was early yet; people were upon the streets, and the next hour might even bring some of the gang. It would be best to wait watchfully until later, thus doubly assuring myself that I could prowl about with no peril of discovery.

The night was dark, perfect for my purpose. A slight drizzle in the air, no one abroad except from necessity. A dim light showed through a dingy window of the garage where some mechanic was still tinkering, but beyond that no sign of life was visible for the full extent of the block, until the saloon on the further corner came into view. Its gleaming hospitality invited me, and I strolled along the opposite walk, my coat-collar turned up to shut out the drizzle, and finally crossed over to where I could peer in through the dingy windows. The man behind the bar was unmistakably Polish, and of no high type, and, at first, I saw no other occupants of the place except two roughly-dressed men at a table just inside, who were playing cards silently, a half-emptied mug of beer at each elbow. The room was clean enough, and quiet, yet I felt no inclination to enter. Those were not fellows it would be safe to question, and I would have turned away, but at that instant I perceived the indistinct figure of a woman in the further corner, sitting beside a table alone.

From my position outside I obtained merely a glimpse, yet her presence stimulated my curiosity. She appeared to be young, not badly dressed, and her being in such a place unattended rendered her of some interest. It surely could do no harm if I dropped in for a sandwich and a glass of beer. I crossed to the bar, furtively watchful, but no one except the proprietor apparently paid the slightest attention to my entrance. The two men never glanced up from their cards, and the girl—for she was scarcely more—

merely turned her head, and stared at me without interest. I spoke to the barman in English, and he served me pleasantly, indicating a vacant table. We exchanged a few words, his own speech very broken, while he prepared the sandwich, and the only thing unusual I noticed was the passage of a slight signal between him and the woman across the room. I could not be sure even as to that, but gained the impression that he shook his head negatively, as though to some mute question.

I could perceive her very clearly now as I sat munching at the rye bread, and this view of her served to increase my interest decidedly. Unless it might be the intense brunette blackness of hair and an extremely clear complexion there was nothing typically Spanish in her appearance. Indeed she impressed me as thoroughly American in features, dress and manner, somewhere in the twenties I should judge, with brown eyes, and a face decidedly pleasant to look upon, although with a firmness to it, expressed by mouth and chin, not to be mistaken. I noted these things hurriedly, never venturing to stare at her, though she apparently gave me no attention whatever, gazing calmly out through the dingy window into the dark street, her hands, ringless and ungloved, rather nervously fingering a small hand-bag looped about her arm. Once she took from it a small vanity box, and touched a powder puff to her cheek, the movement revealing a delicate watch clasped about her uplifted wrist. Somehow the girl seemed strangely out of place in that dingy saloon—she did not in any sense belong.

She was evidently not there seeking company, nor was she drinking. Indeed I found it impossible to associate her with any such purpose; and yet there must surely be some meaning to her presence.

The proprietor approached me, leaning one hand on the table.

"There is nothing more?" he asked.

"No, this will answer very well."

He lingered, tempted to question me.

"You have not been in before? Perhaps you do not live near?"

"I do not," I replied frankly. "I travel out of Boston, and sell lumber. I have been doing some business with the yard down below."

"I see. You just blow in on your way home. You are not from New York, I make it?"

"No; Boston has always been my home."

"Once I live there, too; when I first come north from Rio. What you think about this war? We lick Germany—hey?"

"Oh, I don't know; she seems to be more than holding her own."

"Ach, yes. But now this country go in, what then?"

I looked up quickly into his face, with a swift desire to test his real sentiment.

"This country! Why should it go in? There are Germans enough over here to stop that."

"Not Germans—no. But internationals, revolutionaries. They are more than you think. 'Tis time for them to strike a great blow."

"You are Polish, are you not?"

"Yah, from Warsaw. I come over six years."

"To America?"

"To Brazil. I like it better here."

"Naturalized?"

"I have first papers—why you ask?" suspiciously. "I always been good citizen, I guess."

"No doubt of that. I merely questioned from curiosity." My eyes wandered once more to the girl across the room, and he noticed the glance.

"You wonder what she do in here?" he asked. "I tell you. She was my niece, an' sit here to wait for a friend to walk home with her. It is not a good neighborhood, this, for a woman alone in the dark. So she wait here till her friend come. Soon he will arrive; then they go out together—see?"

"Her home is some distance?"

"Five—six blocks. It is a dark, bad way; often she wait here so, when she come from the city late. It was more safe she do so."

He moved back toward the bar, apparently satisfied with his examination of me, as well as his explanation. I wondered grimly why he had taken the trouble to tell me all this, and ordered another glass of beer as an excuse to linger there a while longer. What was the party like who was to call for the girl? Would it be a man, or woman? I did not have to linger long to gratify my curiosity. The side-door opened silently, and a man stepped briskly inside, shaking the raindrops from his coat, as he greeted the barman cheerily.

"A dirty night, Jans," he said, glancing swiftly

about, his eyes sweeping over me sharply. "Business not very good, I suppose?"

"Dead. It's no good now any more, with all the factories closing up because of the war. Just some salesman drops in for a beer. That makes me nothings."

The newcomer laughed, evidently put quite at ease by this quick explanation. I was watching him. A rather thick-set fellow with a turned-up mustache, and a disfiguring scar on one cheek, which gave to his eye a peculiar expression. His eyes were furtive, unpleasant, and his teeth gleamed prominently, with a suggestion of cruelty. Watching the fellow I must have missed some signal, for he whirled about suddenly, and confronted the girl, who had already risen to her feet, and stood expectantly, one hand yet resting on the table. Instantly he stepped forward, bowing eagerly, with white teeth more prominently exposed.

"Ah, Señorita! You were waiting for me to come," he exclaimed. "Yet I have not kept you long."

"Oh, no," she answered quietly in Spanish, her voice so low the words barely carried to where I sat. "Only the surroundings are not particularly attractive. You were delayed?"

"A car blockade at the wharf. No, thank you, Jans, nothing to-night. You would go, Señorita?"

"There can be nothing to remain longer here for surely."

I watched them disappear through the side-door, marking his grasp on her arm, and her quick glance

aside into his face. There had been something wrong about this meeting, something undeniably awkward and constrained. These two were not what they pretended to be—old-time friends meeting incidentally to walk home together. They were strangers, coming together there for the first time by appointment. Neither had previously known the other. I had even detected fear, doubt, in the expression of the girl's face.

Yet I dare not move, or attempt to follow them. I could only sit quietly, my eyes on the window fronting the street. I watched intently, but no shadows passed that way—the two had not turned down Gans Street.

CHAPTER IV: ON THE RIGHT TRAIL

MY mind worked rapidly as I sat there motionless, afraid to make the slightest move lest it arouse suspicion. These two people were strangers; they had met in this odd spot by appointment, and for some secret purpose. My unexpected presence had disturbed their plan, and they had endeavored to deceive me by pretense at a previous acquaintanceship. Whatever the object of the meeting might be, Jans was more or less involved. He had signaled to the girl twice, and his words, however innocent they may have sounded, must have brought a warning to the man. Beyond doubt he had questioned me with the distinct purpose of thus discovering why I had drifted into the place. I dismissed utterly his statement that the young woman was his niece—her very appearance gave that the lie.

He had gone back behind the bar, and was busily polishing the glasses, but his glance into the mirror enabled the fellow to easily observe my slightest movement. I must remain there, apparently indifferent, until he no longer suspected me of seeking to follow those two; yet I meant to trace them, if later I found the slightest chance. The strange circumstances of their meeting, the marked difference between them, their effort at secrecy; their conversing in Spanish, all

combined to arouse me to action. Something was wrong, perhaps not criminal, perhaps in no way associated with the affair which had brought me into that neighborhood, and yet suspiciously wrong, and I felt inexorably driven to find out what it all meant. The girl was no criminal. It was impossible to believe she could be; but that fellow she had just gone out with—he was equal to any crime. I finished my beer slowly, and then selected a cigar from the case, and lit it deliberately. Jans leaned over the bar, speaking confidentially, and I had to remain, although I cursed inwardly at the delay. Yet I broke away at last, assured that I had finally lulled every suspicion to rest, and passed out through the front door.

The street was deserted, and rain-swept, the few lights showing mere pin-pricks in the darkness. A half glance backward revealed Jans, my emptied mug in his hand, staring out through the window, as though to note which direction I took. I plunged straight across the street, as though headed for the nearest car-line, and then, in the shade of darkness, retraced my steps, passing the corner, until I attained the side-entrance. Here, assured that I was safely beyond observation, I paused to gain some conception of my surroundings. This was not easy of accomplishment. The street was muddy, and ill-lighted, indeed the only light I saw was halfway down the block, a mere glimmer, tossed by the wind, and rain spattered, its feeble rays scarcely discernible. Across from where I stood appeared the dim outlines of a long ramshackle building, apparently a shed of some

kind, while beyond the saloon was a row of one-story dwelling houses, seemingly exactly alike, and exhibiting no evidence of being occupied. There was nothing in the outlook to guide me.

In which direction had the couple turned after their exit through the side-door of the saloon—to right, or left? If to the right could they have crossed the street, beneath the sputtering lamp, without my seeing them through the window? I could not be sure, yet the feeling gripped me that, in all probability, they had turned the other way, down this black passage.

Jans had unconsciously pointed in this direction when he told of where the girl lived, and, although that was doubtless a lie intended to deceive, it was no more than natural for him to have thoughtlessly designated the proper point of compass. At least I must take a blind choice in my search, and this appeared by far the more probable.

I threw away the cigar, a vile weed, and advanced cautiously, finding the narrow sidewalk one of boards, in very bad condition. One or two of the houses showed dim lights within, as I drew near, but these were barely visible through tightly-drawn curtains, and the street itself remained utterly deserted. It was only when I attained the end of this row of houses, and came to the entrance of a narrow, dark alley, that I found the slightest proof that I was, by good fortune, upon the right trail. It was above this opening that the incandescent bulb flickered dimly, yet, in spite of wind and rain, gave me glimpse of the mud underfoot. The two must have been the only ones

passing that way since the drizzle began, for their footprints were yet visible in the soft mud of the crossing as they advanced beyond the safety of the board walk—the narrow shoe of the woman particularly noticeable and clearly defined. By bending low, and keeping my own shadow out of the way, I was able to trace their progress for two or three yards quite easily, and then, to my surprise, the footprints turned abruptly to the left, and disappeared entirely.

To all appearances the two had proceeded down the alley. I searched between that point and where the sidewalk began again, but without discovering the slightest mark to show they had gone on. Black, uninviting, as that gloomy passage appeared, they must have turned into it, and groped their way forward. Where? For what purpose? I could think of but one object—the Alva Iron Factory, the mysterious meeting place at 876 Gans Street. Beyond all question this alley would skirt along the back of that building, and there would be an entrance at the rear. I must have blindly stumbled on the truth, and even found the means of probing it.

Dare I go on alone, unarmed as I was, knowing nothing of what I might encounter? I hesitated, my heart beating like a trip-hammer, yet, after all, the danger seemed more of the imagination than reality. There was little more than darkness to fear. If the Iron Factory was the place these two people sought, they were already there, and I would assume but little risk in stealing silently down the deserted alley in the endeavor to assure myself of this fact. I had no

thought of accomplishing more than this, alone and unaided, yet, as matters stood now, I had nothing to report; only vague suspicion. Besides, I was still young, and venturesome; the situation appealed to me, and—well, the memory of that girl's face remained strangely insistent. Whoever she was, whatever her purpose might be, she was taking a grim chance alone there with such a companion. Odd as it may seem, her predicament yielded me a reckless desire to have an immediate hand in the game.

I found two imprints of her narrow shoe in the mud after the turn had been made, then all trace vanished. The dim light penetrated only a few yards, and, in addition to this handicap, a sufficient amount of ashes had been deposited along here to make the walking fairly hard and dry. I crept forward, enveloped in gloom, keeping as closely as possible to the high board fence at the left. This was broken in places, and diversified by an occasional barn, or outhouse. Once I struck an open door, the darkness so dense I never realized its presence until I ran full into it with my head. The way was rough underfoot, and my progress consequently slow, being anxious to make as little noise as possible. Indeed the passage was so black, I lost all knowledge as to how far I had gone, and was only aroused to my position by finally coming up against a pile of lumber which completely blocked the further end of the alley. I recalled dimly that the passage swerved here, running along the side of the Alva factory, until it reached Gans Street. Then the place I sought was to my left, behind the protec-

tion of this high fence, along which I had been so cautiously feeling my way.

It required a moment or two to study this situation out, all the surroundings appearing strange in that darkness. The silence was profound, stupefying, uncanny. Against the lighter lead of the upper sky I was barely able to trace the upper story of the building, but it was all black, a gloomy, deserted hole. Any faith I might have had that the two I had attempted to follow had come there vanished as I strained my eyes for some gleam of light, or any other sign to denote their presence within. I still believed they had turned down the alley, but this was not their goal; beyond doubt they had entered some gate along the way, and thus escaped me entirely.

So impressed was I with this probability that my interest in the chase failed; nor did I any longer feel the necessity of caution. I hardly know what impelled me to grope my way back along the fence blindly feeling for a gate. Curiosity no doubt, and a lingering desire to make certain of what was inside the barrier. The entrance was easily found, a mere wooden door, held by an iron clasp, which opened instantly to my touch. I stepped inside, closing it quietly behind me, and stared uneasily about through the enshrouding blackness.

My eyes, grown accustomed to the gloom, made out dim outlines, encouraging further exploration. A brick ell came within four or five feet of the fence, and I felt along this with my hands, locating a number of windows, but no door. This ell was of one

story, and not as wide as the main building, which towered up against the sky, and, discovering ample space there, and what felt to my feet like a walk, I turned the corner in search. At that moment the gate latch clicked sharply, and I sank down into the black ground shadow, every nerve tingling with alarm. The gate operated almost noiselessly, yet my strained ears could detect its stealthy movement, and hear the crunch of a heavy footstep on the cinder path within. The fellow evidently knew his way even in that darkness, for there was no hesitancy in his movements, no uncertainty. He passed within a few feet of where I crouched, evidently feeling for the wall in guidance, because as his outstretched hand touched the bricks, he growled a word of satisfaction, and turned sharply away. To my eyes he was no more than a lump, a shadow, almost shapeless in the folds of a long coat. Only the heaviness of his step, and the gruffness of his voice in that single exclamation, identified him as a man. Then he faded away along the rear wall, and I became aware that the fellow had turned about the further corner. That would naturally mean there was a door there. I had evidently been searching the wrong side.

Assured the man had vanished, and that he sought entrance to the building through some passage well known to him, I crept forth along the end wall, crouched low in the shadow, and using every precaution against discovery. This was getting interesting, exciting, and I felt my blood leap with an intensity of emotion. All that was venturesome in me held high

carnival, and nothing of danger now could have held me back. I reached the corner around which the fellow had disappeared, but, in the intense blackness, could perceive no movement beyond, no sign of any presence. I listened eagerly, scarcely venturing to breathe, and in another moment was rewarded by hearing the gentle tap of knuckles on wood a few feet away; there could be no doubt of the number—two raps, a pause, three raps; the very signal mentioned in the letter. I stood up, so anxious to hear, to confirm my discovery, as to forget caution. Yet what followed could not be determined—there was the low murmur of a voice, then silence. I heard no door open, or close, and my eyes caught no faint glimmer of light. I waited, still breathless, uncertain what had occurred, yet convinced the man ahead had been given entrance.

Unable longer to withstand the strain I took a step forward into the darkness. At that instant the latch of the gate clicked behind me.

CHAPTER V: WITHIN THE FACTORY WALLS

I STOOD as though paralyzed, with one foot uplifted, a hand pressed against the wall, unable to move. There was nothing I could do to avert discovery, no place in which I could crouch in hiding. If there had been I was given no time in which to act. The newcomer moved swiftly, knowing his way through the darkness, and I had scarcely opportunity to even glance backward, when he rounded the corner, and bumped into me. His coming was so swift, so unexpected, I could do no more than throw up one arm, and, even as I did that, all thought of resistance vanished with the sound of his voice.

"What the hell!" he exclaimed, startled at the encounter. "Why, damn it, Charlett, what are you slouching here for? You're Charlett, ain't you?"

"Yes," I muttered, the assent actually frightened out of me; then added lamely, "I couldn't remember the signal."

The fellow laughed softly, releasing his grip on my coat.

"If you attended more meetings you'd be letter perfect," he said, his English without an accent. "Where have you been the last month—out of town?"

"In Washington," I ventured, praying the swift answer might suffice.

"Oh, I see," more heartily. "So you were the one Alva sent? Did the woman come back with you?"

The woman! Who could he mean but the same girl who had been waiting in the saloon? I had ventured already too far to draw back; I must take yet another chance, an answer.

"Not with me; that would be too risky. She is here though."

"Good enough; that is what brought me out tonight. That means money. Let's go in."

He pushed past, and I followed, totally unable to determine in my own mind what to do. If I broke away the act would queer everything; undo all that had thus far been accomplished. The fellow in the darkness evidently mistook me for some one of the gang. His confidence in my identity as Charlett might win me entrance—but what then? That I was not Charlett would certainly be revealed by the first gleam of light, and I would be helpless. I was alone, unarmed, and these fellows, beyond question, were engaged in a desperate game. They might even murder to avoid exposure, and my death in their hands would never be known. I am sure I should never have ventured it had not my companion suddenly turned and grasped my sleeve.

"You saw Mendez, of course?"

"Sure."

"And he vouched for her; he says she is all right?"

"He chose her; that ought to be enough."

"Hell, I suppose so, but even Mendez has made mistakes. Here's the door."

He rapped lightly, his fingers still gripping my sleeve in a grasp of friendship. I could have broken away, and ran for it, but something mysterious held me, some odd fascination of danger. I saw nothing, heard nothing, yet had an instinctive feeling that a narrow wicket had opened in the door, through which our dim outlines were being scrutinized. I held my breath expectantly.

"Who is there?" the voice was a mere whisper, so close as to startle me.

"Gaspar Wine," was the answer, in the same low tone, "163."

"What word?"

"Cervantes."

"But there are two of you."

"Oh, this is one of us. It's all right, Juan; I'll vouch for him."

The fellow inside grumbled something in indistinguishable Spanish, but opened the door silently, just far enough for us to slip through one at a time. It was as dark within as without, and I stood helpless, unable to venture a step. I felt Wine press past me, and was aware that the guard closed and barred the door, but could see nothing; not even my own hand before my eyes. Wine spoke.

"All closed?"

"Yes. Have you found the door?"

"Not yet. All right, here it is."

A latch clicked softly, and a dim ray of light broke in upon us from a revealed passage beyond. It was so faint as to scarcely render features visible, and, as

my coat collar was still upturned, I pressed forward close behind Wine without discovery. The fellow never glanced back, or gave me any attention, although doubtless aware of my proximity. Indeed he growled back across his shoulder an admonition to close the door as I entered. I could perceive something of the fellow now, a rather squat figure, concealed by a long, shapeless raincoat, wearing a closely-trimmed beard, and horn spectacles. His features were clearly foreign, yet failed to bespeak the fighting type. I placed him as a theorist, a professor, perhaps, in some small college.

But my thoughts were not so occupied with my guide as with the problem of how I was to escape from him. I dare not go on into the presence of others, where discovery that I was not Charlett would be immediate. A bright light, and the necessity of throwing aside my concealing coat-collar would end the whole adventure swiftly. Even if the real Charlett did not chance to be present, he was nevertheless one of the conspirators, and consequently well known. At any cost I must avoid such exposure—but how? The place in which we were gave me little inspiration. It was a low passage-way, enclosed by rough board walls, instantly driving home upon me the impression that it had been constructed for the very purpose for which it was now being utilized—a secret entrance to prevent any gleam of light from being seen without. Visitors were admitted into a totally dark entry, the connecting door not being opened until after the outer one had been first securely closed. This precaution,

coupled with the tightly-boarded passage, left the whole building apparently deserted and desolate, to any chance watcher without. The roughly-boarded hallway was not part of the original factory; it had been especially constructed with this end in view. The knowledge awoke within me a new conception of the importance of this secret organization into whose midst I had come. This was evidently no common, vulgar band of schemers, but men with a definite purpose in view, which they were engaged in, carrying out with true secret efficiency. They were plotting revolution, fully aware of their own personal danger, and quite evidently in close communication with certain officials in Washington, as well as South America. They were the puppets of those higher up, but their plans were evidently deeply laid, and their secret meeting place as securely hidden as possible. Only a strange chance had given me the clew, and only a reckless persistency had opened a way before me. Now my life was no longer my own; it belonged to my country. I must live to expose those men. But how?

There was no way in which I could answer. My heart failed me as I stared about at the bare walls, and forward to where a heavy curtain draped the end of the passage. This widened as we advanced, so as to form what evidently had been designed as a cloak-room, for a number of outer coats and hats hung dangling from hooks on the wall. Wine stopped, and removed his own, appropriating an unoccupied nail, and I followed his example, rejoicing to observe that

he still remained so confident of my identity as to not once glance around in my direction. The fellow seemed obsessed with some special desire, for he swept his eyes over the swinging garments, and exclaimed:

"Not half of them here yet. I want a word with Alva before the show opens, Charlett, so you better go right on in. You know the pass-word, of course?"

"Cervantes."

"That's correct, but it will be changed again tonight. See you later."

He pressed something in the side-wall, sliding back a panel, and disappeared, the rough boards returning instantly into place. I was left alone, staring at the spot where he had disappeared. It was no secret entrance, for now that I knew where it was, the spot could be clearly enough perceived, and even the catch with which it was operated noted, yet I was not expected to follow into what was evidently a more private apartment. Beyond doubt the entrance awaiting me lay straight ahead, concealed by the hanging curtain. I stepped cautiously forward, listening for some guiding sound from beyond that barrier, afraid to draw it aside and take a blind plunge into the unknown. I could detect the murmur of voices, several of them speaking Spanish, yet in such low tones I could distinguish only an occasional emphasized word. It was rather a rumble than a conversation, yet with expression sufficiently distinct to make me judge there might be eight or ten persons present. There was no door between us; only that thick, hanging curtain, and I ventured far enough to draw this aside sufficient to

peer through with one eye. Beyond was a reasonably large room, but so dimly lighted as to be scarcely visible from end to end. I could discern men present, a number of them, lounging about on chairs, their outlines being fairly revealed, but the light was not sufficient to give me any impression of their faces. It seemed quite possible that I might slip in unobserved, and pass among them unrecognized except through accident. The one thing which restrained me was Wine's questioning if I knew the password. This must mean that it was the duty of some guard beyond that curtain to make sure of every one entering, and it would be rash indeed to face scrutiny, even in that half-light. The risk of discovery was too great. I must find some other point of entrance.

My eyes anxiously searched the side-walls. The private doorway through which Wine had disappeared gave me the thought that there might also be others. I dare not follow after him, but if there was another opening to be found I was perfectly willing to explore into its mysteries. The search was brief, yet the very nature of the rough board wall made concealment impossible. Behind the dangling coats I uncovered what I sought, and not a moment too soon. Even as my hand touched the exposed latch, a murmur of voices in the outer entry reached my ears—there were new arrivals being questioned, and admitted.

The panel slid back silently in its grooves, and I peered through the revealed opening into absolute darkness. All I could be sure of, as exhibited by the dim light of the passage, was a single step downward,

and then apparently a strip of earth floor. Evidently this was part of the unused, desolate factory, more than likely the molding-room, yet it offered immediate concealment. I dare not wait and meet those entering; there was but one choice of action. I pressed through the orifice, forced the panel back into place, and stood erect in the intense darkness and silence, listening for the slightest sound.

CHAPTER VI: A SPORT OF FATE

I WAS still motionless, my heart beating fiercely, when several men entered the passage I had just left. I could hear the shuffle of feet on the wooden floor, and the sound of their voices. Pressing my ear against the thin crack I even distinguished words so as to piece together scraps of conversation. It seemed to me there were three voices—one speaking Spanish entirely, the others using English. One of the latter spoke first, shaking the raindrops from his coat.

"'Tis a dirty night out, but good for our purpose. You came by motor, Alonzo?"

"No. Wine said that was too risky. I walked from the car-line. What's up? Do you know, Captain?"

The fellow addressed exploded in Spanish.

"Why you call me that? I tell you my name!"

"It's safe enough in here, but I'll be careful outside. What was this meeting called for?"

"Alva did not tell you?"

"He only sent the code signal; that fellow takes no chances."

"'Twas better he do not. He was trained in the army. But I know—yes. It was a message from Washington, orders maybe, that we act soon. I hope it."

"From Washington? Is Mendez here?"

"Saprista, no! Can he move without a dozen spies at his heels? You not know Washington to ask so fool question. He dare not write even, or send an aide. The Ambassador have him watched every minute. He is smart enough to know that; so he find a messenger no one ever suspect. She bring the word."

"She? A woman?"

"Sure! that was better. No one know her; no one ever see her with our people. It was a good trick, and it fool the pigs."

"And she is actually here? You know she is here?"

"Sure, else why did Alva call us to come."

"But who is the woman?"

The other uttered a gruff exclamation of disgust.

"If I know, you suppose I tell? Not much, but I do not know. They trust her—is it not enough? 'Tis my guess she come special for to do this."

"She is a Chilian then?"

"Maybe; maybe American, Spanish. What difference if she be in our service? They know what she is; to-night she is Marie Gessler—it has the sound of Switzerland. Beyond this I care nothing."

"But you have seen her, perhaps?"

"Not a sight; none of the boys have. She was to meet Alva at Times Square this noon. I went with him, but no girl—just a messenger boy there with a note in code. Something had frightened the lady, and she made a night appointment over here."

"Here! How did she know the way out?"

"She didn't for the matter of that; but she had been

piped off on Jans' place, and agreed to be there as soon as it was dark. I'm wondering if she showed up; let's go in and see."

The three moved off down the passage, still conversing in subdued tones, the sharp accent of the Spaniard most prominent, and I became acutely aware of the black silence in which I stood. It was hard to realize my situation; to comprehend that I was not alone in this building, but in the very midst of desperate men, planning some mysterious act of treason and revolution. They were there, separated from me only by a thin wall of board, yet no sound any longer told of their presence, and no ray of light penetrated the desolate place in which I had found temporary refuge. My inclination at that moment was to escape, to get away unobserved. I had already overheard enough to make my earlier suspicions positive; enough to enable me to tell the story to a government agent in such a way to convince him of its truth and importance. There was no occasion for me to risk my life farther in an effort to learn more. I had located the secret rendezvous of this gang of revolutionary plotters. I knew who many of them were, and had some inkling as to their immediate purpose. I was aware of their direct connection with the Chilean Junta at Washington, and it would be a comparatively easy matter now to capture them red-handed. I saw therefore no reason why I should venture further, or endeavor to learn in detail the nature of this message intrusted to the girl for delivery. Whatever it was did not greatly matter, so the government agents took

action in time. My duty now was to report what I had discovered, when the prompt arrest of Alva, and a few others, would end the whole scheme. It seemed simple enough, if I could only find my way out safely.

But escape unobserved was far from being assured. I was never in a darker hole, and the necessity of moving with the utmost caution was the thing uppermost in mind. With nothing to guide me, and only the most vague sense of direction, I dare not venture beyond touch of the wall against which I stood. A single step forward into the blackness, and I was lost completely. All that my judgment made clear was that I must be facing toward the front of the main building, probably with several vacant rooms between where I stood bewildered, and Gans street. Of course, there were windows along the side toward the lumber yard, yet, as no ray of light streamed in from without, these, doubtless, were all carefully boarded over, and offered no means of escape. However any retreat by way of the lighted passage was impossible; there were guards there at both ends; the only hope lay in a blind effort forward.

I accepted the only course possible, and began to feel my way to the left, skirting the wall of rough boarding, until it widened out into what was apparently the larger room beyond. I was walking over a hard-packed earthen floor, and encountered nothing to yield me any idea of what the place had been originally intended for. If it still contained machinery, none was in evidence within the reach of my hands; nor did I discover any sign of an opening through the

wooden barrier. No sound reached me from any direction, the silence and darkness oppressing me, as though they had weight.

Yet one fact became more and more clear—the deliberate purpose with which this deserted iron factory had been prepared for a secret rendezvous. It was a lesson in efficiency, an illustration of a fully developed plot system. I began to imagine that the whole arrangement reached back through years of preparation; that the man Alva had originally established this factory with no other aim in view, but as a screen to his real activities as an agent of the Chilean revolutionaries. If not, he had certainly thoroughly perfected it for such a purpose, the moment the need arose. Apparently, from without, it stood grim, desolate and deserted, yet the interior arrangements were such that conspirators could meet securely inside, protected from observation, in rooms through whose walls no gleam of light might be visible from either street or alley. Only an accident, or constant vigilance without, could reveal the true use to which the building was now being devoted. This knowledge rendered the peril of my own position the more intense. I could be killed, murdered, and no man would ever be the wiser. I would simply disappear, vanish, and that would be the end. Nor did I have any reason to doubt that these men would hesitate to encompass such a crime. It would be their lives matched against mine, and I could expect no mercy. The very precautions they had taken against discovery proved the seriousness of their purpose, and the desperate danger

they felt themselves to be in if discovered. The chances were they would hesitate at nothing; be appalled at no crime, so it won them safety and success.

At that moment I had no thought but to discover some means of escape. The knowledge of the danger I was in robbed me of all courage. I was like a child afraid in the dark. I moved forward, inch by inch, feeling my way along the rough planking with one hand, my limbs actually trembling under me. If I could only find some opening; see some gleam of light; break away from this terrible silent darkness. The partition wall I followed narrowed into what was apparently a mere passage way; then as suddenly widened out once more, as though enclosing another room. I had to guess at the meaning of this, yet the most natural conception would be that the place had thus been divided into several apartments, so separated as to permit of private conference. That other doorway, through which Wine had disappeared in search for Alva, doubtless led to some such more secret room. And this which I was now skirting was yet another. At first I thought it extended as far as the brick wall of the factory, but finally discovered a narrow passage-way running between.

I supposed I was moving with the utmost caution, every nerve on edge, feeling a way forward with hands and feet. Once I stepped upon a shell of some kind which crunched beneath the weight, and again my groping hand dislodged a small block of wood, which fell with a slight clatter. I halted both times, my heart in my mouth, yet nothing happened, and I

moved forward again confident of not being overheard. There was no opening in the rough boards and I had rounded the corner into the narrow alley before anything occurred to cause alarm, or block my passage.

Even then I could not have told what it was that halted me. Some strange consciousness of another presence, felt but unseen in the intense darkness; a mysterious premonition that seemed to grip me with hand of steel. I remember I stopped as though shot, my very breath suspended, one foot still uplifted in a step forward, my eyes staring helplessly into the black void. The silence was that of a tomb. I could feel the perspiration flow down my face in a stream; it was an instant of torture. Then an unseen hand gripped me, and an electric flash-light glared into my eyes.

CHAPTER VII: I BECOME A WELL KNOWN THIEF

THE sudden, unanticipated attack, the burst of dazzling light in my eyes, rendered me for the moment utterly helpless. I was blinded, and so tightly grasped at the throat as to be nearly strangled. I only dimly realized that my assailant was a man, his grip that of a giant. Then, to my surprise, the fellow laughed oddly, snapping out his light, and releasing his grip.

"Well, if this don't beat hell," he said, in the tone of cheerful disgust. "Come in here, and let me look you over."

His hand closed on the sleeve of my coat, and before I scarcely found time to catch my breath again, I had been dragged through a narrow opening, and became aware that a door shut silently behind me. I stood there, not daring to move, not knowing in which direction to turn, unable to guess what had occurred and completely mystified by that odd exclamation. Who was the fellow? Had he recognized me in the flare of the lamp? What was his purpose now? These questions surged through my mind unanswered, yet somehow not in despair—his voice had expressed unbounded surprise, startled wonderment, yet was in no way hostile.

He gave me little opportunity to either act, or think.

A match flared, and was held aloft to a gas jet which instantly broke into a dull flame, sufficient to render visible the full extent of the small room in which we stood. In some semi-conscious way I was aware of bare walls, of a small table opposite with some writing materials on it, and a short bench covered by a blanket. I suppose I saw these things, yet all that I seemed to perceive was the man fronting me, who stared in my face, a quizzical smile on his lips, as though still half uncertain of the reality of my presence. He was tall, a trifle angular, but exceedingly well-dressed, with closely trimmed iron-gray beard, and peculiar eyes deeply set in a rather chalky face. I could neither guess his age nor race, but was absolutely convinced we had never met before. He broke the silence, evidently inclined to look upon this meeting as a joke.

"Don't recognize me, I reckon? Well, that ain't to be wondered at, for likely enough you never saw me before. Beats the devil though why you should drift in here; now I suppose it will have to be fifty-fifty."

His words and manner gave me a new lease on life. I began to feel cool, cautious, my mind awakening to the situation. Whoever he might be he was seemingly friendly. I must meet the fellow in that same spirit, and endeavor to extract from him some knowledge of whom he supposed me to be.

"I do not quite get the drift of all this," I ventured. "You imply that you know me."

"Hell, yes. Over in Bow street, on the other side. The Hartlebury robbery case. I'd been hearing about

you for years, and when that came on, I took a chance, and drifted in to court one day just to see what you looked like. Naturally I didn't make no great display with all them Scotland Yard guys about."

"Of course not."

"Just slunk into one o' them back seats, and hung on quiet. You was testifying fer yerself at first, an' so I had a good look at yer. Say!" admiringly, "that was sure some defense, and it made them Britishers blink. I knew they'd never be able to hold yer on the evidence. But it queered you over in Europe, I reckon?"

"Yes," I admitted, realizing now what he probably took me to be, and prepared to play the character. "The system made it too hot, so I got out."

"The sensible thing to do. There is nothing over there now, since the war. That is why I jumped for the U. S. You've shaved your mustache, and look ten years younger, but I knew you, all right. I never forget a face. Say, who put you onto this game—Waldron?"

I nodded, taking a chance. "I'd have bet my life he was the guy—the damned sneak. I might have known he would double-cross me some way. Say, he's nothing to you, is he?"

"No; I haven't any use for his sort."

"By God, I thought as much. Of course a tip's a tip in this game, and I don't blame you any for horning in. Naturally you never knew this was my game—how could you? Waldron never said a word about me, did he?"

"Not once."

"That is how I had it sized up, so I don't hold any grudge against you. Now listen," and he bent forward confidentially, lowering his voice, so I could barely distinguish the words. "We'll talk it all over later, when we're alone. 'Tain't exactly safe here, for these walls are thin, and there is quite a bunch around to-night. But understand I've got a cinch with these Spanish suckers. Hell, it makes me laugh the way they take the hook. There's plenty for the two of us, if we play the cards right, and we'll let Waldron hold the bag. What do you say, Daly?"

So my name was "Daly." Well, that was interesting at least, although it gave me no new light. However, nothing remained for me to do except agree to his blind proposition.

"That's mighty handsome of you. What's the figure?"

"A million!" enthusiastically. "Can you beat that; and like taking candy from a kid. Wait until I get a chance to explain the plan, it looks like Providence had just handed us out the money."

"Why not explain the scheme to me."

"Not now; there ain't time." He glanced at his watch, "and besides, for all I know, some guy might be listening in to what we say. You see there is a bunch o' hell-cats in there waiting for me to give them a song and dance. I'm the big end right now, but I've got to sing low until I'm sure what word these guys have got from Washington. After that I'll know how to trim sail."

"The woman, you mean?"

"Sure. Some foxy guy, that fellow Mendez, to send a skirt. This is a ticklish business for them legation fellows to be mixed up in, and anyhow they are piped off everywhere they go. I know that. So he picks up this female, and nobody thinks about following her. Of course Mendez knows she is his kind, and all that, but the wise ones are not on. Still she's foxy enough herself for the matter of that; likely an old hand at the game. She wouldn't even meet Alva over in town. Not much. It was over here in the dark, or not at all. You know the sort, Daly—the South American revolution stuff—it's hell to buck against."

"You put her down as a secret agent?"

"What else? And a damn good one, to my notion. The truth is I am more afraid of her than all the rest of the bunch combined. She's got brains and nerve, that girl. I had ten minutes with her, just now, and fairly sweat blood, but, by God, I got by. It was like the third degree, only I'd rather face any bull than have her damn eyes search me—they're pretty enough, but they're sure wide open."

"I saw her, I guess—rather young, and a brunette; the last type I would expect to find in such work."

"You never can tell; 'tisn't what they look like, it's what they got in their heads, and this one has got plenty, believe me. Mendez knew his business when he picked her. Where did you glimpse her?"

"In a saloon at the end of the block. A man joined me there, and they left together."

"That was Alva. He's head of things here. You wait until I come back, Daly, and then we'll plan this thing out. I'll know the lay of the land then, and how to work. You think I'm aiming to play fair, don't you?"

I looked at him doubtfully.

"Well, of course, I've got to think so," I admitted, hoping to gain further enlightenment, "but you leave me pretty well in the dark. What do I really know? Nothing. You talk glibly about a million you propose going fifty-fifty with me on. That naturally sounds good, but it would sound better if I even knew who I was dealing with. I have some idea of what is in the wind from what Waldron told me. That is why I came here—to get a crack at it. But you've got the advantage—you know me, but I never saw you before in my life."

"Hell, that's so," he grinned cheerfully, "I forgot I wasn't talking to an old pal. Just to be sure you're Harry Daly was enough to make me cough up, but that don't help you out, does it? You don't place me, then?"

"No."

"Ever hear of 'Gentleman George' in your travels?"

"George Harris!" the name leaped to my lips in inspiration: only the day before I had chanced to read a magazine account of a famous criminal exploit. His eyes gleamed in genial appreciation.

"I thought maybe that would fetch you," he said exultantly. "There ain't many of the old boys but have my number, and they all know I play square.

How is it? Will we shake hands, and call it a deal? I've got to get back in with that bunch."

I took the extended hand cordially, feeling the iron grip of his fingers. I do not believe I was ever more frightened in my life, although outwardly cool enough, and my brain perfectly clear. Never had any man drifted into a stranger position, with danger of exposure fronting him on every hand—yet there was no retreat possible. I must go on, acting out the strange character in this drama to which I had been assigned.

"But you are not known by that name here?" I ventured.

"I should say not. I'm Horner, P. S. Horner of Detroit. See! That's the guy who had the papers. He was English all right but pretended to be United States, and had a passport to come through with this bunch. So I've got the bull by the tail—for a cool million, old man, a million. All I'm afraid of is that damned woman—they always did get my goat."

"Keep still, and let her show her cards," I suggested, feeling the necessity of saying something.

"What I'm aiming to do. Well, so long, Daly. I'll be back presently with everything straight. Better turn out the light, or some one might wander in here."

I was alone again, in the dark, but under vastly different circumstances than when wandering blindly about between those imprisoning factory walls. This thing which had occurred to me was about the oddest that could happen to any man. With no effort of my own, purely by blind chance, I had been given a new name and identity, and as instantly inducted into a

revolutionary criminal plot as fascinating as it undoubtedly was dangerous. Who Harry Daly might be I had not the slightest conception. My knowledge of "Gentleman George," alias Harris, was entirely accidental, merely recurring to memory through the late reading of a fugitive item; but I had never felt the slightest interest in the criminal world, and consequently whatever exploits might surround the classic name of Daly remained to me a closed book. Beyond question he would be a thief of ability, so well known and respected in his particular line as to awaken admiration of the truly redoubtable Harris. The willingness with which the latter accepted me thus into immediate partnership evidenced his fear of doing otherwise. Plainly enough he felt that his cake was dough unless he did consent to divide the spoils. Seemingly Mr. Daly's reputation in the underworld even outranked his own.

It was hardly a compliment I relished to be thus mistaken for a thief, even an extraordinarily expert one, yet there was no escape from the conviction that Harris believed blindly in my identity. He was not acting, for he would have no possible object in such pretense. The recognition had been immediate, as soon as the flashlight revealed my features, and, fortunately, my blind answers thus far had aroused no suspicion. I was to his mind Harry Daly, a well-known criminal, an international thief, a man after his own heart, to be warmly welcomed into partnership as a most valuable ally.

What should I do under these peculiar circum-

stances? Seek to escape during his absence, and thus frighten the covy, or remain, and trust fortune to show me a way to both expose their villainy and save myself? I was young, adventurous, and I chose the latter, thinking less of the danger, I admit, than of the mystery of the case, and—yes, the girl.

CHAPTER VIII: A LITTLE OVERHEARD

I SAT there in the dark after this decision, endeavoring to piece together the various discoveries of the past hour. It was a difficult task, and at the end I had to rely largely on guess-work. What was the nature of the scheme which had so suddenly led Harris to return to America, and how was he involved in what evidently was a Chilean conspiracy against the neutrality of the United States? He spoke confidently of thus gaining possession of a large sum—a million dollars, surely a stake worth daring much for—but how, by what means, did he expect to get his hands on such a fortune?

My mind reverted to the fragment of letter which had sent me on this mad chase, to its mention of a letter of credit to be deposited with the banker Krantz, to the credit of the recipient. The writer had stated that the sum would be found ample for all needs. But a million dollars! Could it be possible that so large an amount would be thus advanced? If so, then the result hoped for must be proportionately important. What could it be? Such a sum was not to be advanced by financiers anywhere, without a certainty of profit, and the most consummate trust in the agent. Who was the agent? To whom had this letter been sent—Alva, who apparently was the active leader here in New York, or the revolutionary representative in

Washington, seemingly known as Mendez? Whichever it was, that man evidently had the disposition of this vast sum entirely at his disposal; either it was already in his hands or so deposited as to be quickly available. In my judgment the fellow would be Alva, for sundry reasons; first he had been one of the men registered at the hotel when the lacquered box was lost; and second, the expenditure of this money was seemingly intended to be made in and about the port of New York—if I read the message right, in the purchase of arms and munitions for shipment to South America; perhaps the enlistment of a body of fighting men.

So far the matter was fairly clear—Alva as the local revolutionary agent had been intrusted by the Junta with this money to spend in a certain definite way; but he must work under strict orders coming from the headquarters at Washington. He dare not assume the initiative without the "O. K." of the man higher up—Mendez. Something had occurred to delay action; that made no difference, but now the time had come. Mendez, unable to be present in person, and even fearful to permit any of his well-known Junta representatives to appear in this connection, had chosen to send a woman, who would be unsuspected, to deliver to the conspirators his definite plan of action. All this seemed reasonable enough, and in no way surprised me.

But the appearance of the woman did, and also the close intimacy of this man Harris. To my amazement I felt a deeper interest in solving her connection

with the conspiracy than I did in learning exactly how the thief became involved. I could guess his purpose—the lure of a million easy money would tempt him to take any chance. How the chance came made little difference; once on the trail he stuck. But she was not criminal, not even of the insurrectionary class to my eyes, and I could not imagine what influence had ever induced her to accept such a commission. I had had no word with the girl, had merely watched her furtively across the room. Only once, questioningly, had her eyes been uplifted and met my own. Yet something about her personality, some undefined quality of womanhood, had made a definite impression upon my mind, not to be effaced even by these strange circumstances. Everything was against her—the saloon in which she waited alone; her coming there secretly in the night; the meeting with an unknown man; the accompanying him up that black alley to this hidden rendezvous of conspiracy. Every act stamped her as unworthy. Beyond doubt she came with every credential properly attested—otherwise Alva would never have escorted her to this secret place of meeting. She was trusted, confided in by the high Revolutionary authorities at Washington. Surely there could only be one meaning to all this—that she was an important part of their conspiracy. Somehow the very thought sickened me.

I could not reconcile her face, her manner, her personality, with the playing of so despicable a rôle. In spite of all this evidence as to the truth of the matter, nothing harmonized. She did not belong—the gulf

was too wide. Yet there was no other explanation possible—she was actually here, in the den of conspiracy, alone among all these men, unafraid, the recognized representative of the Chilean Revolutionary Junta, bringing with her direct from Washington those final instructions for which they waited—instructions, no doubt, involving unneutrality, destruction, death, frightfulness, the extinction of a friendly government; all this that could be compassed by the expenditure of a million dollars in ruthless hands. It was unthinkable, yet every evidence proved it true.

There came to me an insane desire to overhear what she had to say; to watch her once more, when free to study her unnoticed, and to see this gang to whom she brought her message. What part would Harris take to further his ends? Would she innocently play into his hands? Would she in some way reveal the nature of her own connection with this vile political conspiracy? Almost without realizing my action I crept in the dark out into the narrow passage, and felt my way along the rough board walls. No ray of light, and no sound of a voice told of the presence of others. So far as any outward evidence was concerned, I was apparently alone in the great building. But I knew differently. Somewhere, and within a few feet of where I stood undecided, a secret conference was being held, hideous crime, treason, plans involving death, being discussed in whispers perhaps, and schemes of destruction being outlined that might involve the loss of hundreds, the overthrowing of a nation.

As I advanced cautiously the full ingenuity with which the place had been prepared for just this foul purpose became more apparent. The narrow passage I followed, my hands touching either wall, was not straight, but curved to the right, and it dawned upon me that it skirted the main apartment, where, in all probability, the conference was being held. This accounted for the fact that no gleam of light was visible, and that, in anticipation of their use, separate and small rooms had been constructed, connected together yet so isolated as to permit of the utmost privacy. One of these Harris had left me in, and now I found that the passage led me not direct to the main apartment, but to another smaller room, whose door barred my progress. This, I figured out, might be the same into which Wine had entered in search of Alva, when he deserted me in the front hallway.

I listened intently, but heard no sound within, and, satisfied the room was without occupants, ventured finally to gain a glimpse inside. With eye at a narrow crack I could perceive most of the interior, as a gas jet turned low shed a dim, bluish gleam sufficient for revealment. It was a room not altogether unlike the one I had just left, although smaller, and containing a chair or two in addition to the writing table. A blanket on the floor served as a rug, and in one corner were shelves containing several bottles, and a box of cigars. I noted these things quickly, my gaze straying to a partially open door in the board wall to the right through which a brighter glow of light streamed.

My ears caught the sound of voices, the words indistinct.

Although convinced the small room was without occupants, I was some moments screwing up my courage to enter. To cross those few feet, and approach that slightly open door involved a peril of discovery that tested my nerve to the uttermost. The slightest sound might betray my presence, and, at any instant, some one might have occasion to reënter the smaller room. Yet there was no other way in which I could learn the meaning of all this, or be prepared to intelligently play my part later with Harris. To trap the fellow I must know his purpose, be able to answer his inquiries, and seem conversant with his villainy. A moment at that door might yield me the necessary clew to the whole affair; aye! might even enable me to comprehend how this girl—Marie Gessler—had become involved in it. I think now that last reflection was what really drove me to the attempt—a strange desire to learn, at first hand, who and what she actually was.

The door opened toward me, but it would be suicidal to attempt viewing the room beyond through that opening. However engrossed those gathered within might be, some restless eye would be almost certain to detect my presence. The only thing I dare venture was to gain such survey as was possible by means of the narrow crack below the hinge on which the door swung. This afforded me the merest glimpse of one side of the room, revealing four or five men sitting motionless on a bench against the wall, evidently lis-

tening intently to what was going on opposite them. With the exception of Wine, who was third in the row, no face I saw was in the least familiar—two being pronouncedly Spanish, the others not so easily recognized as to nationality. That which impressed me most strongly was rather their well-groomed appearance, and the cut of their clothes. This was no gathering of vulgar criminals, scheming to war against society—these fellows were seemingly successful business men.

But if my range of vision precluded my seeing these few in whom I was most deeply interested, I had no difficulty whatever in overhearing their voices, and grasping the sense of what they were saying. As a general thing the words used were English, although occasionally some one requested an explanation in Spanish, which was immediately given. I drew the impression from something which was said that there were those present who did not understand the latter tongue. However, almost the first sentence overheard convinced me that I had arrived too late to learn directly the nature of those instructions received from Washington. Alva was asking a question.

"But we are ready to act now," he said impatiently, his foreign accent faint, yet plainly perceptible, "have been ready for a month past. What necessity then is there for further delay?"

The woman, whom he evidently addressed, must have been very close to the door; her voice soft, but speaking with clear enunciation, sounded almost within reach of my hand.

"The reason is Valparaiso, of course," she said, "it is not Washington at all. When you strike, the people must be ready there. This is not rapine, it is war. I said ten days yet. I do not know positively, the real aim may not be what we suppose at present. The final orders might arrive to-morrow, to-night even. You say you are prepared, Señor. That is what I was sent to learn, and I find you are not prepared."

"Not ready! We are organized and sworn to service."

She seemed to lean forward, her voice changing almost to a whisper.

"I see that, your eagerness, your devotion. But that is not readiness for such a duty. Who has been chosen for the act itself—the post of danger? No one. Until the man I need not name dies, we can accomplish nothing. You have taken no ballot. If the single word was flashed to-night, 'Go,' and it may be, who among you is authorized to execute the order?"

She paused, but no voice spoke.

"Nor is that all; the money from England yet lies untouched. Surely your instructions were clear, and nothing is being accomplished for the cause while it rests idle in the vault. It will require all of thirty days to distribute this into the proper hands, here and in Chili, yet nothing has been done. We supposed it was already in circulation. What caused the delay?"

One of the men on the bench spoke, a heavily built fellow, with a long gray mustache, and horn spectacles shading his eyes.

"All I know iss et vait on der order of Gustave Alva to be endorsed by Señor Mendez. I hol' ett so in trust, from the agent."

"In the bank vault, Mr. Krantz?"

"No; dat would not do. Ett was in a private safe, a package of currency, only I know where. The bank hav' nothings to do with der deal."

"I understand. The agent gave you personally the Letter of Credit, which you immediately cashed, and you now hold the currency subject to call?"

"Certainly; dat vos how ett vos."

"Your instructions were to turn this into cash?"

"Not in writing—no; dar vos no writing. The agent he tell me."

"The agent? Oh, you mean 108? What about that arrangement, Mr. Horner?"

I recognized Harris in the reply, his voice perfectly calm and confident. In all probability he lied, but it was done most convincingly.

"Those were my positive instructions in London," he said coolly. "The banking house there was not to be involved in the slightest degree; no trace of the transaction was to appear on their books. I explained it all to Krantz, and he said that was much the safer way."

"But why has the money not been drawn and used?"

"That is for Alva to say. I tried to get him to act, but he refused without another authorization from Mendez, and special instructions."

"You never received these, Señor Alva?"

"No. I asked by code; I supposed he would answer by messenger."

There was a pause, a silence. I imagined I could understand something of what Harris was endeavoring to accomplish in this delay, this getting the entire sum transferred into currency in private hands. It was one more step in his intricate scheme of robbery, but so cautiously concealed as to arouse no suspicion. What else had he done to this end already? Had his verbal instructions to the banker been false? Did he know exactly where this fortune was hidden? To achieve delay, and thus gain opportunity, had he intercepted, or even changed, the code message, sent by Alva to Washington?

All this was possible enough, yet it was evident that the woman accepted the explanation as satisfactory.

"I do not know how true all this is," she said at last, slowly. "Nothing was said to me about such a code message. I was told the money was already being used. I do not believe there is any necessity of any further endorsement, as Señor Alva is working under direct commission from the Junta, with full authority to act. However, I will verify this to-morrow. I am going to retire now, Señors, and leave you alone to discuss the matters I have presented. Above all it is necessary that I should know at once who you select for the important work, and when we may expect results. This information I must positively take back with me."

"When do you return?"

"On the midnight train. I have three hours yet."

CHAPTER IX: A STRANGE APPOINTMENT

I MUST have failed to grasp the full meaning of what she said, or else it never occurred to me that her retirement would be made through this particular door. At least she had pushed it wide open before I realized the necessity of retreat, and I was hemmed in behind its barrier, fortunately securely hidden from the eyes of those in the larger apartment. Some one —Alva, no doubt, from his words and voice—was beside her as she emerged, and, indeed, it might have been his hand that swung the door back against me. I stood there startled, unable to move, afraid that my very breathing might be overheard.

"You leave at midnight, you say, Señorita," he protested in Spanish; "but surely you intend to remain here at present?"

"Until you reach some final decision—yes; that is my mission."

"I shall see to that at once; we will draw lots. You can wait either in this room, or another just beyond. Promise you will not go until I see and talk with you again."

"I promise that—so you are not too long. I must make that train."

"You shall make it. My car is only two blocks away, and I pledge myself to have you there on time.

All this business can be attended to in half an hour."

He stepped back, partially closing the door, while she turned, her own hand on the latch, facing me. Her eyes stared directly into mine, her face whitening under the light, her teeth shutting down close against the red lips as though to repress a scream. She was startled almost beyond control, yet mastered the fright instantly. Her eyes darkened, one hand pressed convulsively against her heart; then she glanced about at the partially open door, and silently closed it tightly.

"What—what are you doing here?" she gasped in English, her voice trembling. "Listening?"

"No," I lied, seeing but one possible means of escape, and hoping thus to prevent her sounding an immediate alarm. "I was waiting for a friend who is inside. I just came into this room."

"From where?"

"Back yonder. I got tired of sitting alone in the dark."

She glanced past me into the mouth of the black passage. Her courage was quickly coming back, and with it a flash into her cheeks.

"You actually belong here then? You are one of these men?"

"Not exactly," I had to admit. "I know one of them very well, and he stationed me out there."

"Oh, I see—on guard?"

"That's about it."

"You were told the word?"

"Of course."

"What was it?"

"Cervantes."

She appeared puzzled, doubtful, yet to my surprise still held the door tightly closed, her eyes searching my face.

"Who is the man you know—your particular friend?"

I hesitated an instant, the name escaping me.

"Horner."

"Oh, indeed; you were not very prompt to answer."

"Well," I said, and managed to smile, as though it was of little consequence, "you see I have not always known him by that name. There are times when names need to be changed occasionally."

"True," she admitted soberly. "In this case I believe he had to arrange his identity to fit a passport. Is that it? Do you mind gratifying the curiosity of a woman as to what his real name might be?"

"I could not, if I so desired. Ever since I knew him he has been called Harris. That is all I can say."

"Harris! Then he is not Chilean, and never before pretended to be. I thought that from the first. Is the man American, English or Irish?"

I shook my head.

"You won't answer. That may be ignorance or it may be pretense. Never mind. I recognize your face now. You were the man eating in the saloon an hour or so ago. Were you waiting for this Horner—alias Harris—then?"

"We met later."

Her lips smiled a little, and her eyes.

"Did I merely dream that you appeared somewhat interested in me at the time, or was it true?"

"It was true." I answered honestly. "You did interest me."

"Yet you had no knowledge as to who I was, or why I was in such a place?"

"Absolutely none. Perhaps that was what most greatly interested me. You didn't appear the sort to be making a rendezvous out of a saloon, however respectable it might be. The proprietor even volunteered the information that you were his niece."

"Did he, indeed? That was very nice of him, wasn't it? Rather odd, is it not, that you should later drop in here, and find me again. What do you think of me now?"

I looked at her for a moment before I answered, unable to frame my words to any satisfaction. What did she mean? What exactly was she driving at? Her whole manner puzzled me exceedingly. Was she playing me for a fool? Was she attempting to lead me on for some secret purpose of her own? Did she believe my explanation? and, if not, why did she fail to throw open that door, and denounce me at once as a spy? There, in that soft light, she appeared more attractive than ever, and so peculiarly womanly as to seem utterly out of place in this scene of plot and crime. It was a young face, bright, animated, which fronted me, the dark eyes smiling and unafraid, gazing straight into mine, with a challenge in their depths. Her very attitude piqued me, aroused me to defense. I desired to hold her respect, her interest; nothing

she might say, or do, served to lower her in my estimation to the hideous level of a political conspirator. Yet what else could she be? How could I account for her presence in this place on any other theory except that she came as a representative of Chilean intrigue? As the trusted messenger of that secret conspiracy at Santiago, under orders of the revolutionary Junta at Washington? I had heard her words spoken boldly to this band of plotters, words of authority—demands they dare not ignore. No, there was no doubt as to who she was, or what she was. In spite of her face, her pleasing manner, her attractiveness of person, she was a dangerous enemy to this government which protected her, a despicable snake crawling through the dark to strike down a victim—a thing to be crushed without mercy. The very softness, womanliness, only made her the more to be feared. She should cast no spell over me. I would harden my heart, and forget all except the duty I owed my country, and that neutral nation to the South with whom we were at peace.

"Frankly, I do not know what to think," I answered at last. "Your mission here to-night, as I understand it, somehow does not fit in with my natural conception of you as a woman."

She laughed, but so low as to be inaudible to those beyond the closed door.

"You amuse me. Cannot a woman—even a womanly woman, if you please—love her country and be willing to sacrifice in its behalf?"

"Not to the extent of treachery and deceit; not to

the end that innocent men and women suffer," I returned hotly, forgetting caution.

"And is that my purpose here, you think?"

"Is it not? This is a neutral land, yet what else can this conspiracy contemplate but cowardly destruction? Violation of international law? Can you answer that?"

"I refuse to answer—here and now, at least. Nor do I know why you should ask. Why are you here, and how? Do you realize the ease with which I could open this door, and give you over to the mercy of those men in there? After what you have just said, why do you suppose I fail to do so? Because I am such a womanly woman, perhaps."

"Rather because you have no reason to so act. I may denounce your connection with this affair, believing it no fit work for any true woman to be engaged in, and yet myself be no traitor to the cause."

"You still hold me a true woman then?"

"Yes; I may be blind, but I retain faith."

"That is good—yet do not trust too much in any woman. So you are the friend of Horner, alias Harris? Do you know I hold that to be quite a distinction. What is your name?"

"D-Daly, Harry Daly."

"You seem to have some difficulty to-night in remembering names. Does this mean you also possess a variety? Evidently I have fallen among a very interesting community."

She stopped, listening intently, her head tilted back

so as to better hear what was occurring behind the closed door.

"Be quiet," she whispered, one hand held forth in swift warning. "They are through in there, I think, and Alva will be out in a moment. Now listen! Don't ask any questions, but listen. Will you pledge yourself to do whatever I say?"

"Within any reasonable limits—yes."

"Limits! Don't talk limits," impatiently. "You say you are blind, but retain faith. Act on that faith blindly. I cannot speak here; there is no time, no opportunity. To-morrow at two o'clock, come to 247 Le Compte Street. Will you?"

"Yes."

"Do not mistake the number. Ask for Miss Conrad. Now go back there and wait for Horner. Quick —they are coming out."

CHAPTER X: HARRIS TELLS HIS STORY

I PLUNGED hastily into the passage, and groped my way back between the narrow walls to the secluded room in the rear. I was too confused, too startled, to even think clearly. My conception of this woman, her nature and her purpose, had been changed a dozen times during this brief conversation. Even now I was utterly in the dark. Was this engagement for to-morrow a decoy? A shrewd effort to detect me, and lead me into a trap? or was it extended honestly and with some real object in view? What could have caused her to place confidence in me? Did she have some secret motive in the carrying out of which she deemed me useful? Did she hold me as friend or enemy? If the latter, why was I not immediately exposed? Surely there could be no better place than this in which to put me out of the way—yet, instead of raising an alarm, she had conversed in whispers, had helped me to disappear, was even then protecting me from discovery.

The situation was impenetrable. No explanation I could conjure up brought any satisfaction. I could only sit there in the dark on the bench, and wait the return of Harris, without so much as a clear thought to guide me. Did the woman know me? or suspect the reason of my presence? That was manifestly im-

possible. She was utterly strange to me, and she was not one to be easily forgotten. Why, then, did she trust me—if it was trust?

It must be either that, or treachery of the foulest type. "247 Le Compte Street"—I could not recall the neighborhood, only a vague conception of red brick buildings of exactly the same general style—probably fairly respectable boarding houses. And I was to ask for "Miss Conrad." Who might she be? Not the lady I had just left surely, for she was scheduled to take the midnight train for Washington. There could be no doubt of that, as Alva would drive her to the station, and probably see her safely aboard. "Miss Conrad" might be anything—a strange woman, an accomplice, even a disguised policeman. It masked some trick surely, of which I was quite liable to be the victim; behind my lady's smiling eyes, and cheerfulness, there was surely some marked purpose. This was the impression with which I ended—that for some end unknown she was coldly playing with me, leading me on. Very well, I would go where she directed in that belief, forewarned, and therefore prepared. But I would go alone, just as I had promised.

I began to think Harris had gone away with the others, and left me there alone. I heard voices speaking earnestly in the distance, but without venturing forth from my hiding place. Nothing was to be gained by exposure, and, as these sounds grew less, and finally died away altogether, I became convinced that most, if not all, had left the building. Then he appeared suddenly, bringing in his arms a bottle from

the shelf in the other room, and the box of cigars.

"Touch a match to the gas-jet, Daly," he said, feeling for the table in the dark. "That's better. I hung around until the gang all got out, so as to be sure we were safely alone. This is a safer place to talk over private affairs than down town in a hotel."

"There is no one about then?"

"Not a one; saw the last guy slip out ten minutes ago. They go one by one, you know; that's what takes time. Have a drink, and light up, old man. We are as secure here as we would be at the bottom of the sea. This is Alva's whisky, but good—I sampled it before."

He sat on the table, nursing his knee, rather pleased with himself, I thought, a cigar thrust between his lips, the blue smoke curling up before his face. I ignored the invitation to drink, but helped myself to a weed, waiting for him to open conversation.

"Well," he said finally, "everything is going according to Hoyle, but there is a knot or two yet to be untied before we squeeze that million. What do you say, Daly?"

"I don't know how I can say anything until I get a glimpse at your cards," I returned, "and am on to the game."

"That's true enough. Did you hear what was said in there?"

"No; you told me to stick here."

"Still in a way you're on—Waldron must have spilled part of the scheme to you, that's what got your foot in the mess. Hell! I know Ivan Waldron, the

damned Russian Jew; he'd double-cross his best friend. I used to know him when he ran a 'fence' down in Mulberry Street when I was a kid. I'll bet that was about where you met him first. He's playing up with the big ones now, but he is the same damned liar and sneak he was then—always after some one else to pull his chestnuts out of the fire. Then he comes along, and grabs them, and you go over the road. What was it he told you?"

"Not very much," I said, wondering how far I had better go, yet feeling it necessary to relate enough to convince him that I was really conversant with the situation, and endeavoring to imitate his style of speech. "He caught on to my being here, and met me at Halligans. After a bit of footwork, he coughed up what he was after—a safe hand for a big job. According to his story there was a gang of conspirators here—birds from South America mostly—who had been rounded up by this fellow Alva to pull off some frightfulness, or other. I didn't catch on to just what it was, and perhaps Waldron himself didn't know, or care. Some damn revolution, I took it to be. What interested him most was the amount of money certain guys in Europe were sending over for this fellow Alva to spend. Waldron explained how he got hold of the scheme. It seems he's in with the bunch to some extent; that is, they use him whenever they need to, and occasionally hand him a bunch of money—it's never too dirty for him to touch. Anyhow, he knew enough to put me wise to this dump, gave me the pass-word, and all that. It looked as

though there might be something in it, so I blew over here to-night just to take a look. I didn't know there was any pow-wow on, of course, but just wanted to see the layout. I was merely prowling around when I ran into you."

"I see," he muttered, as I came to an end, chewing savagely on his cigar. "Did the Russian say anything about me?"

"Not a whisper. I supposed I had a clear run for the money, except his rake-off."

"The dirty dog. Because I didn't show up on the dot, he was ready to ditch me. Oh, I don't blame you, Daly. Naturally when you was shown a good thing you started to cop it. Any guy would do the same; but I'd like to get my mitts on that damned Russian. Now listen, and I'll tell you the straight story. I'm going to need you, and we'll divide fifty-fifty, leaving this guy to suck his thumbs. Is that a go?"

"He's sure nothing to me—shoot."

Harris poured out a stiff drink, and put it down; then touched a match to the extinguished cigar. The flame lit up his face, revealing its deep lines, and a pair of watchful eyes. Somehow he had the appearance of a fox.

"Waldron sent me a cable in England about a month ago," he explained briefly. "He didn't make the thing very clear, only that he had a big deal on, and wanted me in on it. I wouldn't have paid much attention to him if business had been worth a darn over there, but it wasn't. It was rotten. Besides, I was getting

in bad, and had to lie low; so I took this as a life-saver. I had made enough to get back on, and took a second-class passage on the *Vulcan*. It was not a big boat, and, to escape close inspection, I went aboard at Queenstown. At that time I had no more notion what was up than a blind rat. I was just desperate enough to take a chance."

He paused and relit his stub, with an oath at finding it again useless.

"Then things begun to happen. I was room-mate with a bird named Horner, who claimed to live in Detroit. He had a bit of Spanish accent—which only cropped out now and then—that made me think maybe his name was a fake, and so I got to watching the guy, for lack of something better to do. He must have cottoned to me, for we got a bit chummy, and in that way I picked odds and ends out of him which set me thinking—his stories didn't quite dovetail; and so finally I said to myself: 'Old boy, you've got something up your sleeve; this voyage ain't no pleasure trip for you, and it's up to me to find out what your game is.' He was quite a foxy bird, though—one of these tall, rawboned, secretive cusses, who talk a lot, but never say nothing, and he came near getting my goat. I went through his baggage, of course, but that was just ordinary stuff—he only had one grip, which he left unlocked; but I did get onto a pocket belt the fellow wore around his waist. He never let that get away from him night or day. I studied every damn way I could think up to get a peep at it, but nothing

gave me a chance. I came near going bugs over the thing."

He laughed, exhibiting a row of rather ugly teeth behind his thin lips.

"Then the devil must have helped me. One night —five days out, for we were a slow boat—we ran into a hell of a storm. I've been across seven times, and never struck a worse shindig than we ran into. We both of us tumbled out, and began hustling on our duds. I was close beside Horner, when a wave struck us that must have been a monster. He was trying to get a shoe on, and went plunging head-on into the side of the ship. I reckon it nearly brained him, but, to make things sure, I handed him one to the jaw before he got his senses, and he went out for the count. Then, believe me, I didn't lose no time in frisking the guy—and, say, what do you think I found?"

I shook my head, unwilling to interrupt, fascinated with his description.

"The fellow was a revolutionary agent. I didn't get onto all of it then—I didn't have time, but I found a Letter of Credit for a million dollars, and a memoranda of how it was to be delivered. The damn thing wasn't any good to me—it was to be paid to this fellow by a banker in New York named Krantz—but it sure made my mouth water just to see it—a million dollars, good old U. S. currency. Can you beat it?"

"Looked easy—you had it, and you didn't have it."

"You said it, Daly. I never was in such a pickle. I didn't dare keep the thing, and it wouldn't have done me any good if I had; there was no way of my

cashing the paper. What the hell could I do? I had to think blame quick before that guy got his head back. If I denounced him, the game was all off; if I held on to the stuff he'd report his loss soon as he landed in New York, and that letter of credit wouldn't be worth the paper it was written on. . . . Say, I was in some boat; but, believe me, I had no notion of giving up that million—it looked darned good."

"I should say yes," and I leaned forward to show my interest. "And from what I know of you, Harris, that guy had no show on earth. Did you croak him?"

He grinned, evidently pleased at the note of admiration in my voice, and tossed down another drink.

"That never ain't been in my line. Of course I was tempted to—a cool million would tempt any guy. But right then I couldn't see just what good it would do; it wouldn't get me the coin. No, I just shoved everything back exactly where it come from, and fetched the steward. Between us we hoisted Horner back into the bunk and dosed him with water till he came to. First thing he did was to feel for that belt, and he never got wise that it had ever been touched. Anyhow, he never let on to no suspicion."

CHAPTER XI: THE PLANS OF A THIEF

I WAS impatient for him to continue, but he sat there chuckling to himself, and toying with a fresh cigar.

"Well, what did you do?"

"Played it safe and sure. I'm too old a bird to be caught napping. I put in most of that night holding wet cloths to Horner's head, and thinking out some plan of action. Before morning he thought I was the best fellow he ever knew, and I had the guy where I wanted him. For one of his breed, he was rather a friendly cuss. This was how I mapped it out. That Letter of Credit had to be turned into currency before it could do me any good, and the only way that might be done was through this guy Alva. I must get to him somehow in a way that would put me next his scheme, so I'd know when he had the cash. Once I got these details attended to in little old New York, the swag was as good as my own. I knew a dozen guys that would bump Horner off for a hundred if it come to that—so the price wasn't high. A million! oh, man: and it had dropped right into my lap. But to do this it was necessary that I should be Horner. That was as plain as the nose on my face; as Horner, coming with credentials, and a Letter of Credit, Alva would be bound to receive me with open arms—see!

He couldn't suspect but what I was all right, and would naturally cough up all necessary information. After that I figured it would be easy enough. But how was I to become Horner?"

"You couldn't divvy with him?"

"I should say not; he was a square guy. It didn't take me five days to find that out. So there wasn't but one way out of it—I had to put Horner out of commission, and cop his belt. It was either that, or lose a million."

I looked at him, with a sickening feeling of horror I found hard to suppress, but he went on indifferently in the same cool, calm voice.

"There's no use going into details, Daly. We landed good friends, and Horner was in a strange land. You know New York pretty well, and I lost him the first afternoon down on the East Side. I never did know just what became of the fellow, but the next morning I was alone in a back room in Greenwich, and had his belt with me." He chuckled grimly. "There wasn't much in it, except the Letter of Credit, but all I needed to know—a small code book, a few memorandums of some deal in London involving nitrate concessions in Chile, two hundred dollars in English money, and a notation as to where, and when, Krantz could be seen privately. This last gave me a clew as to why Horner had been in no hurry to hunt him up, but was so willing to drill around with me a while when we first came ashore. It was the next night he was to call on the banker up in Le Compte Street."

"Le Compte? What number?"

"247 Le Compte. Do you know anybody there?"

"No; only Le Compte is an old stamping ground of mine. Go on; you went there, of course."

"Sure. Krantz didn't know me from Adam, not even my name. I was just '108' to him, but he was mighty nervous, just the same, and anxious to get away. I could see that. I don't think it was his house either; just an ordinary-looking shack, brick, three stories and a basement. There wasn't a light showed in it when I got there, but that guy was looking for me all right—he had the door open before I had time to rap even."

"You saw no one else?"

"Not a soul, and I didn't waste no time looking, either. That banker was business all right, and he put me through the whole bundle of tricks before he'd even let me sit down. You could get into a Masonic lodge easier than into that front parlor with him at the door. I had to lie some, but mostly I was posted well enough so as to give him what he was looking for. Anyhow, I passed, and after that he was rather decent. Took me into a room, and gave me a drink, besides asking me about affairs in Europe. Hell, I didn't know only what I'd seen in the papers—but I gave him an earful, and on the strength of his name, an' cussed England for all I was worth—which at that time was about a million bucks. Then I handed over the Letter of Credit, and he jammed it into his pocket like it was a scrap of paper. I don't remember that he even looked at it. After that he

was for getting rid of me, the sooner the better. But I needed to know where Alva was, so I hung on, telling the old guy I had a private message that I had to deliver personal—straight from them financeers in London. So, after skirmishing about a while, he jotted down an address on a bit of paper, and the next thing I knew I was out in the street, with that gripped in my mitt. Maybe I was lucky not to have got beaned; only if he had made a crack, I'd a got him first."

"And then, of course, you hunted up Alva?"

"The next morning, before any bank opened. I thought over it all night, and got up a peach of a story. I needed it, too, for this Alva was a smooth guy. It took some nerve to get him, but I knew, through Horner's memorandum, some things about him he never supposed was known up in this country; so when I sprung them, natural-like, he quit being offish, and gave me the glad hand."

"Who is he? A crank?"

"Not by a damned sight. He's a captain in the Chilean army, military attaché to the embassy at Washington, intrusted with certain work. But he's really working to overthrow the present Chilean government—gettin' up a revolution down there. He's no cheap skate by a long ways. Say, after I finally got him loosened up, he was a prince. I lied until I was black in the face, but I must have kept within bounds, for he got to liking me real well. He was a high-roller, and I put him onto some things in New York he had never been steered against before. That

made a hit with him. There wasn't nothing said about cashing up all day long, and early the next morning we breezed into a downtown hotel, and went to bed."

"What hotel?"

"Search me. We'd been tanking up on champagne, and were drunker in the morning than when we turned in. That's the honest truth. All either of us wanted for breakfast was a cup of coffee. We got that at a little dump on some side-street, and then took a taxi, and rode around for an hour, so as to brace up a little." He paused to laugh at the recollection, helping himself to a third cigar.

"And you actually retain no knowledge of where you spent the night?"

"Not the faintest glimmer. Can you beat it? A little later we tried damned hard to figure the thing out. Alva lost part of a letter somewhere, and a curious sort of box he had picked up in Chinatown. He put them both in his pocket, so he says, but that was the last he ever saw of either. Queer looking box that was; nothing I cared about, but it cost the guy a hundred bucks, and he was daffy over it. Anyhow, that night put me solid with Alva."

"But the money? He's never drawn it?"

"Not a dinky red. He claims the time hasn't come yet, and that it's safer with Krantz. But I've stuck to him like a brother, and he's took me in with his gang, so now I know every move that's going on. I'm on the inside, all right, and now it's beginning to get hot."

"What do you mean? They are ready to act?"

"Sure; that's what the meeting was about to-night. The Junta in Washington says they might begin to produce results. Alva will have to pry that stuff out of Krantz to-morrow, and get busy. Personally I think the fellow is half afraid; but it's up to him now to fish, or cut bait."

"What are they after—ships?"

"Well, they've got to have some, but mostly arms; then there is a guy down there who's got to be croaked. I don't care what it is; when the time comes they won't find a handful of change to act with. I'm some patriot, I am, and I'll put a bigger crimp in their sails than the whole United States government secret service."

"But see here, Harris," soberly, "how do you know you are going to get this? Of course I see the game the way you've mapped it out, but suppose Krantz pays in check, or draft. That spikes your gun."

"Hell, yes; but he won't. I've sized up this man Krantz. He's in the game for money. I don't believe that bird gives a whoop in hell for this, or any other cause—this is just business to him. He's advancing this coin out of his own pocket on a commission—see! A damn good commission at that. He don't care who wins the damn Revolution, for he gets his share out of the pot right away. He's got oodles of money, and this is no bank investment he's handling. He's playing the game secretly on his own account. Get that? He expects it may be a year, or perhaps two, before he can cash in on the deal, but when it does come his share of profit will be likely

a hundred thousand. That beats bank interest, and the old bird is willing to take the chance."

"Quite likely that's true; no bank would finance such a wild project."

"Of course not—the directors would throw a fit. Well, now that kind of a guy, in on a raw deal like this, is going to play safe, isn't he? He isn't going to leave any evidence lying around to hang himself with—any drafts, or checks to pass through the clearing house? Not on your life; he is too wily a fox for that. Krantz knew this was coming, and he's been cashing in for six months or more to be ready for it. And now he's got the currency stored away, nobody knows where but himself. When Alva comes for it, it will be handed out secretly, and that old bird will crumple up the receipt in his pocket, and wait till he can cash in, through those guys in London. So now it's up to us to locate the dough; we've got to separate it from either Krantz, or Alva—I'm for Alva."

"Why?"

"Because the job looks easier. He's human, and no money grubber. He's just as liable as not to carry the whole wad around with him; damn it. I think that's just what he will do, for he won't dare deposit such a sum anywhere. That's why I have laid back so long, without attempting to strike—I'm banking on the army captain to offer me a soft thing. What do you say?"

I had the whole story now in a nutshell, and it was one to think over. That Harris had played his cards

well was sufficiently evident. Now I must be fully as cautious in playing mine. I felt the fellow had given me his full confidence; actually believing me to be Daly, and on the same trail with him; desiring to use me in what was probably the biggest job of his life, he had been led into the indiscretion of confiding to me the full truth of his scheme. If I kept my head, and nerve, I had it in my power to block everything, and thus bring the whole gang to swift justice. I realized the danger of such an attempt, the immediate peril of endeavoring to accomplish this alone, yet at the moment perceived no other way. I must remain Daly, and appear eager to obtain my share of the spoils.

"A slick piece of work, Harris," I admitted admiringly, "and so far as I can judge you have figured out the chances about right. They look good. If we can locate the swag, and cop it, there won't be much need for any getaway. Those fellows won't dare put up any strong hurrah, for if they did the government would be down on them like a ton of bricks. I'm with you, old man—shake!"

Our hands clasped, and Harris, evidently gratified at my words, helped himself to the bottle, and poured out a liberal dose into the clean glass.

"That is what I thought you would say, Harry," more familiarly. "Come on now and drink with me."

I put the stuff down, rather feeling the need of it, and desiring to establish our intimacy more closely.

"Then that's settled, George—yes, I'll have another cigar. By the way," as I lit up, "there was another

thing I wanted to ask you about. You said there was a woman here from Washington. What's the idea?"

His face darkened, and he let out an oath.

"Damn if I know, but I guess it's all right. Still I don't quite cotton to the dame. She's square enough, as far as that is concerned, but I would rather she hadn't horned in just now. This is how I get it from Alva. Those Junta fellows—the big ones, you know—think this New York bunch is pretty slow; they want some action for their money. So Señor Mendez, who seems to be engineering the deal, decides to send somebody over here to stir up the criminals. But he's watched every minute; secret service men are as thick as flies, and if one of his underlings was to leave for New York, he'd never get ten feet without being spotted. Mendez is wise to this, so he gathers in privately a skirt he believes is all right, and sends her. It's not a decent job for a woman, and that's what makes it safe. He made a good guess, too; that female is as smart as a steel trap. She gave me the cold shivers."

"You don't think she suspects you?"

"No, I don't; there ain't no reason why she should; but she gave me the once over, all right, and I am perfectly willing to know she is on her way back to Washington. I never did play in any luck with a woman in the game—perhaps that's what makes me afraid of 'em."

"What's her name?"

"Gessler, so Alva said—Marie Gessler; South American, I suppose; anyhow, she talked that lan-

guage like a native. I steered clear of her most of the time. Somehow she got my goat. However, that's nothing to worry over." He glanced at his watch. "The dame's safely off by this time. What do you say—let's go home."

I signified my willingness.

CHAPTER XII: THE DESERTED AUTOMOBILE

AS we passed out together through the narrow passage, extinguishing the lights behind us, the one overpowering desire in my mind was to be once more alone, so as to think over, and piece together as best I might this fabric of villainy with which I was confronted. The situation was fairly clear, yet there were strange lights and shadows in it I found hard to reconcile. Moreover, what should I do? How could I serve best—by immediately telling my story to the officers of the law, and thus washing my hands clean? or by continuing to enact the rôle of Harry Daly, and in this way entrapping these fellows red-handed? I had had fully enough of Harris for the present. His boastfulness and pride of crime disgusted me. I had no desire to be associated with the fellow, or pretend, even for a worthy purpose, to be his companion. Yet, all this had happened so suddenly and unexpectedly I could not determine the best course to pursue. I remained dazed and confused, the only clear decision being an eagerness to bring him, and these others also, to justice.

We were the last to leave the place, and emerged from the building into the deserted yard, leaving all in silence and darkness behind us. The door closed

tightly, secured by a night-latch, and we stood motionless in the drizzle. By that time I was ready with a suggestion, but by good fortune he took the initiative.

"We better slip out of here alone, I reckon," he whispered. "That's the way they all do, for occasionally a bull prowls along this alley. I'll go up this way, and then you take a sneak through the lumber yard. Likely we'll catch the same car going down. If we don't, look me up at Costigan's place—you know where that is?"

"Sixth Avenue, isn't it?"

"Sure. Jack is a good fellow, and the bulls never bother him. Ask for Parker, and it will be all right. If I ain't in, leave a note where I can hunt you up. I got to keep my eye on Alva to-morrow, so he don't get away with the stuff."

"You expect him to draw?"

"Not before night; but, just the same, I want to know for sure. You wait here five minutes, for I've got the longest trip to make. You'll show up all right?"

"You can't lose me; it looks too good."

He chuckled and patted me on the shoulder in an excess of friendliness, evidently feeling to some extent the whisky he had been imbibing so freely.

"That's the talk, Daly. Well, so long."

He slipped out through the gate into the dark of the alley, leaving it slightly ajar for me to follow. I sheltered myself behind the high board fence and listened to the soft slush of his feet in the mud. The

sound vanished, and all about was silence and darkness. I waited only long enough to be sure he was safely out of the way, and then followed, eager to be off. One thing was certain, I would make no effort to join him on the car; I would use the remainder of the night to decide the future, working out the problem alone.

To make certain that I avoided any possibility of encountering the fellow again, I passed directly through the deserted lumber yard before emerging upon Gans Street. This thoroughfare was at this hour desolate enough, not a light showing in the houses, or a moving figure visible as far as I could see in the dimness of the street lamps. The rain was steady, the pavement shimmering with moisture, the only sound the pattering of the drops as they fell. If any policemen were abroad I saw no signs, and, with collar turned up to my ears, I chose to walk rather than seek the block to the east and the possibility of a street car.

The factory district ended in a row of houses, dark and silent at this hour, but the walking was good, and I pushed forward briskly, so buried in thought as to become practically insensible to the unpleasant surroundings. The night had been a full one, far exceeding my expectations, yet left me more puzzled than ever as to my own duty. While there was in my mind no doubt regarding the facts—the existence of a conspiracy to foment revolution, and destroy property; while I could even name many of those involved, and lead officers of the law to their secret

place of rendezvous; while I had actually overheard some of their devilish planning—yet I had no proofs to submit outside of my own unsupported testimony. So far I knew of no act of crime with which these men could be connected; they were merely proposing a future attack on a neutral government. If, however, I consented to play my part with Harris, I would not only be in ample time to circumvent any damage Alva and his gang might contemplate, but also gain ample evidence for their conviction and expulsion from this country. In addition to this I would be in position to block the daring plans of this international thief. Altogether it seemed to me that the wiser course for me to pursue at present was to wait, and watch, ready to act at any moment, but keeping my own council until certain that the specific moment had arrived.

Nor in this decision was I oblivious to the strange impression left upon me by my encounter with Marie Gessler. She had interested me oddly, and I could not drive her memory from my thoughts. Our moment of conversation had been peculiar, and her words and actions remained as a constraint. Why had she so deliberately saved me from discovery by those others—her companions? Why had she stood there, her hand on the door, and talked to me in that mocking way? Had she a purpose, an aim? Did she believe my explanation? or was her suspicion aroused into a determination to verify it in some way? Although I could not decide, yet doubtless the latter theory was the most probable. That was why I had

been pledged to call at "247 Le Compte Street," and ask for "Miss Conrad." This was the same place where Harris had secretly met Krantz. Evidently it was another headquarters for these precious villains. Once there, and safely in their power, the truth of my identity could easily be established. Was that her idea?

If so, who then was "Miss Conrad"? Not Marie Gessler, certainly, under another name, for she would have returned to Washington. There was no doubt as to that, for Alva had agreed to take her direct to the depot in his own car, and would scarcely leave until she was safely on the train. Probably the other woman was a confederate, with whom she would communicate by telephone. My clearer judgment told me all this, made me fully conscious of the danger of keeping this appointment, yet never swerved me from an intention to do so. Marie Gessler's eyes were frank and honest; they had looked directly into my own, pleadingly I imagined, and I retained a blind faith in her no ordinary circumstances would overcome. She was involved in this criminal conspiracy —there could be no doubt as to that—but why? under what conditions? What could ever have driven so womanly a woman to such an association? Was her appeal to me an effort at assistance? Was she blindly endeavoring to learn in this way if I was worthy of trust, and confidence? This hope would not down; it remained insistent, persistent. I would keep my word; I would go to the place designated, at the hour set; I would go armed, prepared for whatever might occur of treachery—but I would go. Perhaps here was

the key to the whole mystery; and once I solved her connection with the plot, particularly if it absolved her from blame, and the necessity of exposure, I could go forward with clear conscience, and land these others where they justly belonged.

I must have covered four or five blocks immersed in such thought, almost forgetful of my surroundings, my head bent low before the rain, my feet carelessly slushing through the water in pools on the sidewalk. I met no one, heard no sound to arouse me; all about was dark, desolate, forlorn. Then suddenly I became conscious of some unusual obstruction just ahead. It was at a black corner, where the street light above had been extinguished, and the consequent gloom rendered objects grotesque and unfamiliar. At first I took it for a wrecked wagon lying against the curb, but another step forward revealed the truth—a deserted touring car, its red tail-light plastered with mud, and barely visible. I approached with a feeling of relief; it was not wrecked, no sign of accident was to be noticed. The front wheels rested against the curb as though its owner was visiting somewhere near, and expected to return at any moment. Even in that dim light I could see the machine was no common car, a sedan, its glass brilliant in spite of the rain spatters, and its paint gleaming brightly.

I stared about wonderingly, but could perceive nothing to account for the presence of such a car, or its apparent desertion. One side of the street was a vacant lot, and the only semblance of a dwelling opposite was a one-story cottage, the outlines barely dis-

tinguishable, with no gleam of light showing anywhere. Up and down both streets not a figure moved; not a sound reached me but the slough of the wind, and the patter of rain. I shivered with the loneliness of it all, as curiosity led me to cross the muddy parkway to assure myself as to what this strange desertion meant.

There was no one in the car. I could look straight through the dimmed windows, against the glare of a street lamp a block away. One of the rear doors stood half open, and, tempted by it, I bent over and felt within. My hand touched some object on the floor, and I instantly straightened up with the thing gripped in my fingers. It was a long, thin-bladed dagger—an ornament rather than a weapon—with an odd, fanciful hilt. There were stains upon the polished steel; and the moment I saw it, I knew where it had attracted my attention before—as a pin in Marie Gessler's hat.

CHAPTER XIII: I SEEK MISS CONRAD

I GRASPED the thing in my hand, holding it up incredulously into whatever faint light I could find. There was no question as to its identity; I could not doubt. This was the same peculiar ornament I had observed that evening in the girl's hat, or else its exact mate. I recalled the quaint shape of the miniature hilt too clearly to be mistaken. Then this car was the one in which she had departed with Gustave Alva two hours before. What had occurred in the meanwhile? Something serious, evidently. The dagger on the floor would indicate a struggle, or at least a hasty departure from the vehicle.

I stood staring at it, slowly comprehending the probable meaning of those dark stains on the blade. Their nature could not be determined in so dim a light, yet when I touched them with my finger it became discolored. My God! could it be blood? Blood! it was blood; then this had been a scene of tragedy, of awful crime perhaps. The discovery sickened me, but I had to go on. Something compelled me to seek the truth. I was alone, alone in the dark; not a sound broke the stillness; not a movement proclaimed any other presence. No one suspected yet; no one had even stumbled upon the deserted car. I wrenched open the forward door and peered fearfully within. I could not

but know instantly what I saw—a dim, huddled form leaning forward across the steering-wheel, one hand yet on the spokes, with head dangling helplessly, upheld only by contact with the windshield.

I knew the man was dead before I touched the cold hand; his very posture told that—and how he had died; instantly, from a stab in the back. I could not see his features, the darkness hid them, but desperation drove me to pass my hand over the concealed face; the upturned mustache, the exposed teeth, grinning ironically in death, left no doubt as to who he was—the Chilean soldier and attaché, Captain Alva. The awful horror of it paralyzed my very brain. I closed the door, and staggered back, the tell-tale dagger still gripped in my fingers. She must have done this! That girl must have killed him! But why? for what reason? for what purpose? Could it have been in answer to insult? Had the man dared to press his advances once they were alone? and had she resisted? I would not question his inclination, yet this was not possible. The knife lay on the floor behind him, just as plucked, blood-stained, from the wound. The girl then was not even riding beside him; she could not be to have dealt such a blow—she must have been alone in the rear seat. There in the dark, unnoticed by the man driving, she had leaned forward, and driven that sharp blade unerringly home to the heart. He had suspected nothing in time to raise even an arm in self-defense. Then, dazed, frightened by her terrible deed, forgetful even of the knife in her terror, she had

dashed it to the floor and fled into the darkness, leaving the rear door open behind her.

That was the story; that must be the story. My mind pictured the scene in all its horror. Yet what could account for such an act? What cause could transform this woman, this smiling-faced girl, into a murderess? Her leaving that weapon behind would seem to proclaim that the deed was done in haste, on the spur of the moment; that it had not been in any way premeditated and planned. Otherwise she would have guarded against such danger of discovery. Why, that carelessness alone might ruin every hope of escape, might bring her to the electric chair—it was damning evidence.

I dare not remain there in the presence of this grisly spectacle. To be found would fasten the hideous crime upon me, while such a story as I must tell would never be believed. I did not know even who she really was, or where she might be. I cared nothing for Alva's death; horrible as it was, I was conscious of no regret, but I must not be mixed up in the affair. I could make no report to the police of what I had found, or what I suspected. The only thing for me to do was to disappear, and leave the police to make their own discovery. And the knife? the weapon which had done the deed? What should I do with that?

I did not hesitate long. I would protect her from discovery if I could; at least until I was myself convinced of her guilt. There was no longer the slightest doubt in my mind but what this was her act.

Everything pointed straight toward her. Yet there might be a reason, a worthy cause, and, in any case, she had done a service to the country. The world was better off with this conspirator dead; nor would I denounce the one who had taken his life. I hid the knife in a pocket of my coat, and hastened down the side-street toward the nearest car-line, my only desire being to escape that neighborhood as swiftly as possible.

I clung to the deepest shadows, feeling like a haunted man, but nothing occurred to add to my fears of detection. A policeman lounged past me, as I waited for a car, contenting himself with a curious glance in my direction, yet, muffled as I was against the rain, he could scarcely obtain any definite outline of my features. The car was nearly empty, and I huddled in a corner seat, slouched down into shapelessness, until we reached our destination. By a quarter of three I was safely in my room at the hotel, for the first time feeling a sense of real security.

Yet it was not to sleep. I did not even undress, except to remove my wet outer-garments before flinging myself on the bed. I was tired, exhausted both mentally and physically, yet so nervous under the strain as to find slumber impossible. My brain wouldn't rest, and I lay there staring up at the ceiling, while my mind reviewed over and over again every incident of the night, and planned for the morning. Everything appeared more chaotic than ever. I no longer knew where to turn, or what action to take. How would the murder of Alva affect the plot I had

started to overcome? Would it continue under some other leadership? Who? And the money? what would become of that? What readjustment of plans would Harris consider necessary? I must see him at once in the morning, yet not until after the newspapers gave him an inkling of what had occurred. I had no intention of confessing even to him my knowledge of the tragedy. Once I knew his conception of the situation, I could better regulate my own action. Meanwhile the only safe course was to remain still, and profess ignorance. Then I had the engagement at 247 Le Compte Street—that might reveal something of importance to help me solve the problem.

I got up, removed the dagger from my pocket, and examined it in the electric light. It was a toy weapon, yet sufficiently dangerous for all that, and I looked at it with a sense of horror. How could a woman have ever thrust even that keen blade with one blow through to the heart? Yet the evidence was before me. Those dark stains were blood—human blood—dried now, but unmistakable in their proof of crime. I washed the steel, leaving the blade bright and polished; then wrapped it carefully, and hid it away at the very bottom of my bag, locking the latter against possible inspection by a curious maid. I felt relieved once I had the weapon out of sight. Dawn found me at the window, restless, dispirited, merely waiting impatiently for some opportunity to act.

The morning papers contained no reference to the tragedy—the body of the dead man had not been found in time. There would be noise enough when it

was, no doubt, for Alva must have been widely known and ranked as of some importance. Even if his identity was never established, if no suspicion was aroused as to his position, and secret work in this country, yet the very mystery of the case would create a sensation. But perhaps he had papers on his person of value. I regretted not having searched his pockets. Then the conviction came that possibly here might be the true solution of the murder—a desire to secure some documents the man carried.

I went down to Costigan's place on foot, not being entirely certain of the exact location. It was an ordinary corner saloon, with a stairway leading to rooms above. In the morning hours the bar-room was nearly deserted, but the man at the bar, looking me over cautiously, said that "Mr. Parker" had already gone out, and had left no word as to when he would return. I was rather glad, yet I left a telephone number, with a request that I be called whenever he came back. I waited impatiently for the call in my room, but none came. It dawned upon me that in all probability Harris was frantically endeavoring to find the whereabouts of Alva, as yet having no suspicion of his death. I telephoned Costigan's, but "Mr. Parker" had not returned.

I sent out for a noon edition, eagerly scanning its columns, but finding nothing. Surely the deserted car, with its grim burden, must have been discovered before this. I felt an extreme longing to read the details, to learn if any clew had been found, any theory advanced as to the cause of the murder. The police

must have suppressed the news to enable them to work in secret; they might have found some evidence in the dead man's pockets, or in the dark recesses of the car, by which they still hoped to capture the assassin. Perhaps government detectives were already upon the case, given the scent by something I had overlooked in my haste and eagerness to get away. I cursed myself for a dull-headed fool, yet could do nothing but wait in agony.

I remember eating in a basement restaurant, where I was totally unknown, and then departing for the rendezvous on Le Compte Street. I approached the number given with serious misgivings. If the police were actually on the trail, some knowledge of this place might be in their possession, and I could not be too cautious. The fact that it was here Krantz and Harris had held their interview, coupled with the girl's selecting the same place for our meeting, made me suspicious. She might have fled here to hide; the number might have been jotted down on some memoranda in Alva's pocket.

There was no outward sign of any surveillance as I turned into the block; indeed except for a grocery truck before one of the houses, and an organ-grinder at the farther corner, entertaining a group of children, the street was entirely deserted. The row of brick houses had decidedly a boarding-house aspect, respectable enough, but of medium quality, such as stenographers and clerks, earning a fair salary, might patronize because of convenience to their places of employment. The entire block was so nearly alike

that the numbers alone served to separate them into units—red brick, three stories with basement, and high front stone steps. Mustering my courage, and with a feeling of deep excitement, I advanced up the steps of the one numbered 247, and, finding refuge in the outer vestibule, rang the bell. I heard no distant tinkle, but within a moment or two the door opened a crack, held in that position by a chain, and the face of a middle-aged woman peered out at me. She was framed in duskiness, and I was scarcely conscious of anything but her eyes staring unfriendly into my face.

"Well, what is it?" she snapped, in no encouraging tone.

"I should like to see Miss Conrad," I began apologetically. "I have an appointment with her."

"Not here yer ain't, young man, for there ain't nobody by that name in this house."

"Are you sure? This is 247, is it not? That was the number given me. She was to be here at two o'clock."

"This yere is 247 all right. I ain't denyin' that," the voice more acid than ever, "but there ain't no Miss Conrad yere; so that's all there is about it."

"But there must be."

"Must be nuthin'! I guess I know. I've been yere seventeen years, an' ther never was nobody of that name ever in this house. Besides, I'm house-cleanin' and can't stand yere talkin' all day."

"Do you know a man named Krantz?" I flung at her desperately, in a last effort to arouse some response, "Adolph Krantz."

"No, I don't; ther ain't none of those people yere, I tell yer."

The door slapped shut in my face, and I heard a bolt shot into place—the interview was ended.

CHAPTER XIV: THE THREADS BECOME TANGLED

I STARED a moment at the blank door in bewilderment; then turned away, and slowly retraced my steps to the street. So the young woman had deliberately lied to me; had merely been amusing herself at my expense; had sent me on this wild goose chase so that she might laugh over my simplicity. But was this true? If so, how was I to account for the strange coincident that both she and Harris had named the same number, and street? It could not have occurred merely through chance. Something must have happened in the meanwhile to overthrow all her plans, and to cause this rabid housekeeper to even deny her very existence. And I held the key of explanation—the murder of Alva.

Beyond all doubt here was both cause and effect. The girl had intended to either see me herself, or by proxy in the form of this mysterious Miss Conrad. But what had since occurred had compelled a sudden change in plans, a necessity for concealing her escape. There was no way in which she could notify me, but she might very easily have telephoned to her landlady. And, if the place was what I suspicioned it to be, she might have every confidence that her secret would be guarded.

I glanced up at the front of the house, searching the windows, but without results. The curtains were closely drawn to keep out the sun, and the place appeared forlorn and deserted. At the delicatessen shop on the corner I gained a gleam of light, but merely enough to strengthen my former judgment. The keeper, a flaxen-haired Swede, was loquacious enough, but had only been in business there a few weeks.

"247 Le Compte, you say. Yes, she takes roomers; some are men, and some are women. They come in here and buy, but I never ask the names; it was all cash, so why should I care? Sometimes I hear them call names—sure; but never Conrad. The woman what keeps the house? Wait and I tell you; it is on the books; ah! you read just as she wrote it for me—Mrs. Augusta Waldron; maybe a widow? What you think? Bah, she never like anything I have to sell. I care nothing for trade with her—a cat this Mrs. Augusta Waldron."

I left him with the familiar sound of the name ringing in my ears—the whole thing was traveling in a circle, and the circle was growing continually more compact. Blindly, I was stumbling up against it here and there most unexpectedly. Augusta Waldron, beyond doubt, was Ivan Waldron's wife. No wonder her house was the designated meeting place for these people. I was still up against the ring of the conspiracy, but I could perceive no way of breaking through that ring except by the aid of Harris. And, to count upon his assistance, I must continue to successfully play the rôle of Harry Daly.

I returned to the hotel obsessed with this decision. Only as I stood before the door did I realize that the newsboys were calling out, "Extra! All about the murder!" I felt that my face was white, and that my hand shook, yet I hastily bought copies of half a dozen sheets, shoving them in a bunch into my pockets. At the desk I asked if any call had been registered for my room. There was none, and I hurried up to where I could be alone.

The reports were mostly alike, exceedingly brief and unsatisfactory, except that they conveyed the impression that thus far the police possessed no real clew as to the perpetrator of the crime. They threatened much, and hinted vaguely at certain suspicious characters, yet it was plainly apparent they were circling about in the dark. They had discovered—through a card in his pocket—the identity of the dead man, and this had been made certain by a man or two about town with whom he possessed acquaintance. One of these had even breathed a suspicion that Alva had formerly been in the Chilean Army, an officer, but for some reason the Chilean legation at Washington, when approached on the matter by telegraph, promptly denied all knowledge relative to any captain by that name. One man interviewed recalled the fact that Alva had once been engaged in the iron business in Jersey City, but had closed down because of lack of material. He was known to spend money freely, and believed to be well off.

This was about the extent of the investigation as reported. The police theory was robbery, as the man's

pockets had been rifled, and everything taken excepting some small change, evidently overlooked. No one connected with the meeting the night before was mentioned in any article, nor was any suspicion of such a meeting mentioned. I read the last line with a distinct feeling of relief, dropping the paper on the floor.

They had discovered no clew, nothing whatever to work upon. The interior of the car had yielded no evidence of its former occupant, the only reference being to mud on the floor. Outside all footprints had been obliterated by the falling rain. No one in the neighborhood had heard a sound, or witnessed any movement. The whole affair was shrouded in mystery.

What, under these conditions, was my duty? What could I either do, or say, to clarify this tragedy, and bring the guilty to justice? I sat there for an hour thinking and smoking, endeavoring to answer these queries. I could study out no clear way to any confession, which would not directly involve myself in the toils of the police, or else implicate Marie Gessler, so as to make any defense on her part almost impossible. No doubt she was guilty, yet I could not drive myself to openly charge her with the crime. There must be some extenuating circumstances, some unknown cause, which had led to the act. I could not forget her face, her manner, the clear, womanly look of her eye—she was no murderess, and it was not in my heart to denounce her as such. Besides, if I took this responsibility it would only serve to shield other crime of more importance than the violent death of

this Chilean revolutionary—the murder perhaps of many innocent victims, and the destruction of much valuable property. For Alva's death would hardly stop the plotting already on foot. The money was still here in New York ready to be used; the propagandists at Washington would never permit it to long lie idle. They would find somewhere another leader, and I alone seemed to be in a position to balk their hellish purpose. Perhaps it was even by their orders that Alva had thus been put out of the way. He had acted too slowly, and suspicion might have been aroused as to his real purpose. On every side I was assailed with doubts.

Yet, even if I held silent, I knew not in which direction to turn. I had apparently lost all touch with the girl. She had failed me completely—either by accident, or design. I could not so much as guess whether she was in hiding, or had openly returned with her report to Washington. She had simply vanished. Her appointment with me had served to reveal only one fact which might prove of importance —247 Le Compte Street was undoubtedly a link in the chain of the conspiracy; it was the home of Ivan Waldron. Once I told this discovery to Harris the way might be opened to closer investigation. But what had become of Harris? It was already approaching six o'clock, and the man had not telephoned me. Surely he must be aware by this time of the murder of Alva; the uselessness of seeking longer to find him alive. Was he also endeavoring to avoid me?

was his purpose deceit? or had some suspicion arisen in his mind as to my really being Harry Daly?

Aroused by this possibility, and unable to remain quiet longer, I slipped a revolver from the depths of my bag into a coat pocket, and departed again for Costigan's, determined to learn the truth. The bar-room was well filled, but not with a rough crowd. Drinkers of both sexes were at the small tables, with others lined up at the bar, yet the scene was orderly enough, as the night was young. I approached the same bartender with whom I had spoken in the morning, and he must have recalled me at once, for, without answering my question, he turned and called out to a heavily-set, red-faced fellow at the lower end of the bar.

"Dan, here is that guy who was asking for Parker. He ain't heard nuthin' from him."

The other came forward, elbowing his way roughly through the crowd, and looked me searchingly in the face. He had keen, shrewd eyes, a stubby gray mustache, and closely-clipped hair. I noticed his hand gripped on the edge of the bar, knotted and freckled.

"I'm Costigan," he said shortly. "They tell me you're hunting Parker. Did you have an appointment with him?"

"Yes; he was to meet me here this morning. Then I left a telephone number, but he hasn't called me."

"He ain't been back; that's the reason. Come along with me; I want a private word with you."

I followed him rather doubtfully, although his words and actions appeared friendly enough in a gruff

way. He led the way to a closed door at the end of the bar, which, when opened, disclosed a small business office, containing merely a desk and two chairs. To his rather gruff invitation to sit down, I accepted one of these, chewing at the cigar between my teeth, and endeavoring to appear quite at ease. Costigan, after securing the door, seated himself at the desk, turning his swivel chair about so as to face me, his freckled hands on his knees.

"George told me about you this morning," he began. "At least I suppose you're the lad; your name Daly?"

I nodded, greatly relieved, but unwilling to trust my voice. The man did not know me; had no suspicion. If in the past he possessed any acquaintance with this redoubtable thief, it was either very slight, or else my personal resemblance was sufficiently exact to now pass muster. Harris also had evidently given me a clear bill of health before he disappeared.

"Glad ter meet yer," and Costigan filled a pipe, and touched a match to the tobacco without removing his steady gaze from my face. "We never had no dealings together, but if yer tied up with George, it's quite likely we will have. He an' I hav' been pardners fer a long while. He's a hell of a good guy."

"We just ran into each other accidentally," I explained, feeling that he expected me to say something. "Got onto the trail of the same boodle. He told you, I suppose?"

"No, he didn't. Just said he'd run onto you, and that you were liable to turn a trick tergether. George

don't slop over; that ain't his style. Besides, I don't never care what my customers are doin'. That ain't business; the less I know, the less I can tell if I'm asked questions. Harris knows them are my principles, an' so he generally keeps his mouth shut mighty tight 'round yere."

"But he spoke about me?"

"Well, yes, in a way. But it wa'n't no more than I told yer. He had to go out afore you got 'round, so he said you was comin', an' for me to be decent to yer whenever yer blowed in."

"How long was he to be gone?"

"That's what's got my goat," Costigan admitted grimly. "He said he'd be back in an hour, but he ain't showed up since, ner sent any word. I thought, Mr. Daly, thet maybe you'd let me ask you if he was on any kind of a job where he was liable ter be pinched, er hurt? I don't want to shove my nose into your affairs, but I'm gettin' a little nervous 'bout George, that's a fact. He sorter hinted that this was a damn big job, an' that you was goin' to it fifty-fifty."

Somehow the fellow gave me the impression of being square—honest according to his lights—and intensely loyal to his friends. Of course, I could not inform him as to the whole story, but it might be of benefit to give him some inkling of the situation. His very life experience might yield some clew which would give me a new start. He knew crime, and the ways of criminals, and was evidently anxious to serve Harris.

"There's no harm, so far as I can see, in telling you a part of the plan, Mr. Costigan," I replied slowly, endeavoring to guard my words carefully. "I know Harris has every confidence in you, so I'll take a chance. We're both on to a million-dollar pot —easy money, it looks like——"

"The hell! that's some boodle!" excitedly leaning forward.

"It don't come every day. I'll not explain details, or how the two of us run together on the trail, and agreed to split the pot. That's our business, you'll admit."

"Sure; what was it? a bank job?"

"Better than that—South American revolution fund; coin sent over here from London to pay for arms, and maybe a murder or so. It is all in one bundle, and what we need to do is get our hands on it."

"Got it located?"

"Partly; but that is what caused the delay. We know where the stuff is, but we're still scouting around for a chance to grab it; it's locked up yet."

"I see. Ain't been handed over to the gink who's got to pay it out. That's what George is a-tracin' out now, I suppose?"

"No doubt that is what he started after this morning—shadowing the fellows to whom it was to be paid. What gets me is, why he doesn't return—the guy is dead."

"Judas Priest! How do you know that? What's happened?"

"Why, it's in all the papers; he was murdered last night over in Jersey City—stabbed through the back in an automobile. You saw it, didn't you?"

"Hell! that guy? He was a Chilean captain, or something. What the devil was the name?"

"Alva, Gustave Alva."

"That's it! yer don't think that maybe George bumped him off, do yer?"

"No; I know he didn't; Harris was with me all last evening."

"And you haven't any notion who did?"

I shook my head negatively. Costigan sat for some moments, his chin cupped in his huge fist, his pipe extinguished and his forehead creased in thought. Then he looked up suddenly, a strange light in his eyes.

"Say, Daly," he asked in a hoarse whisper, "do you know if there was a Russian Jew mixed up in this affair anywhere?"

CHAPTER XV: A FRIEND AT THE McALPIN

HIS unexpected question startled me. In a way it was an odd echo of the vague suspicion which had been pursuing me ever since the early afternoon. Somewhere there was a mysterious hand operating—but whose hand? Was some one else grasping for this prize also? willing to even commit murder for such a reward? The suspicion had haunted me, but who this apparition might be had eluded my brain. Now it burst upon me in sudden revealment.

"A Russian Jew?" I questioned. "Why should you ask that?"

"Well, I'll tell you. Maybe it don't amount to nothin', an' then again it might give us the right steer. A fellow they call 'Sly Levy'—he's a cheap thief, a dip mostly—blew in yere last night with a note for Harris. He left it with one o' the night bar-keeps, an' seemed ter be in a hell of a hurry ter have it delivered. Joe he fetched the thing in here to me, after Levy had gone, and I sorter got to wonderin' whut it was all about. George he's a friend o' mine, an' I knew he didn't want nobody to know he was hanging out at my place—see! Then again this cheap-skate of a Levy is a stool. I caught him at it onct, an' he ain't been around me none since. I couldn't quite figure out what he should be bringing in a note to Harris

for. It looked like it might be some dirty police game, an' if it was I wanted a hand in it—see?"

I nodded encouragement to go on.

"The damned thing was sealed, but not stamped, an' there wa'n't no address on it neither. So I didn't think it was no penitentiary sentence to pry it open, usin' a bit of steam to loosen up the flap. But I didn't find much, only two lines spelled out in print letters. 'Where you met K, eight to-morrow. Don't fail; important. I. W.' That was every damn word. Do you make anything of that?"

"Yes, I do," I said heartily. "It's part of this job. I'll explain after a bit. What did you do then?"

"Sealed it up, an' give it back to Joe. I didn't see no harm in it. Naturally supposed it was some business I wasn't concerned it. Harris got it when he come in, an' that's where he went, I reckon. He was gone when I got round, an' ain't showed up since. Do you happen to know who this 'I. W.' stands for?"

"I can make a mighty good guess, Costigan—a Russian Jew, all right; Ivan Waldron."

The scowl on his face remained fixed; evidently the name was unknown.

"Don't know the fellow. Likely enough not; he doesn't operate in your line, but he is a crook just the same. I never saw him myself, but have heard about him for a long while—never anything good. He's an agitator, an anarchist, a revolutionary orator; one of those bugs who fight society and government, and hate everybody but themselves, a loud-mouthed nuisance——"

Costigan's mouth was open.

"Say," he interrupted, "what's that kind of guy got to do with George Harris?"

"He's got this to do with him—he's out after the coin. He saw some easy money, and naturally reached out for it. He was the first one to get onto this particular game. They were using him, this Chilean gang, to pull their chestnuts out of the fire, and that's how he tumbled to this bunch of money floating about, begging somebody to pick it up. He had wormed himself inside, and knew it was coming. But he didn't have nerve enough to tackle the game alone. He wanted somebody else to run all the risk, and then turn over his share. Do you get it now?"

"Sure; he blew the thing to Harris."

"In a way—yes. He sent for him to come back from England, but without explaining just what his graft was. On the way over Harris picked up another end of the same net, and went after it himself. He wasn't under any obligation to Waldron, and preferred to play his hand alone."

"And the Russian has found that out, and now he butts in."

"That's the way I'd read the cards, Costigan."

He sat silent a long while, and I lit a cigar and watched him, his great hands closing and unclosing, as he slowly reviewed the situation.

"Say, this guy what was bumped off—did, whoever did it, get anything?"

"His pockets were rifled, the papers say—all but a little change."

"That bird was after something. Are you sure this fellow Alva didn't have that bunch of money along with him?"

"No, I'm not sure, of course; but Harris had been shadowing him for a month. They got as thick as two brothers, and if the stuff had been drawn he knew nothing about it—that's certain. Still, come to think, Alva was with Krantz the same night. He might have touched him."

"With who?"

"Krantz—Adolph Krantz—the banker. Kulb, Krantz & Company, over in Wall Street," I explained. "The Letter of Credit was drawn on him—a private matter, I understand."

"Is he the same guy that 'K' stands for in the letter?"

"No doubt. He and Harris had an interview at 247 Le Compte Street."

"Le Compte, hey! I wonder who lives there?"

"Well, I can tell you—it's Ivan Waldron."

His fist came crashing down onto the arm of his chair.

"Hell! that's all clear enough then. He and George are up to some deal together. George tried to shake the fellow, and couldn't, so he's doing the next best thing to get a bit of the boodle. He's no baby, George ain't, and he'll show up right side out. Say, I believe this Russian guy is the buck who got Alva."

"Do you think so? Well, I am not so sure of that. But, anyway, what shall we do?"

"Wait until George comes back. There ain't any

cause for us to butt in yet. This is his game, as I see it. If he don't show up by morning, we'll look over this shack on Le Compte, but just now there ain't nothin' to do but sit 'round an' smoke. If it was you, Mr. Daly," he added grimly, "you wouldn't thank nobody to shove in uninvited—would yer now?"

I was unconvinced by his argument, yet knew of no way of answering it. He knew the characteristics of Harris far better than I did, and the code of honor among thieves. Whatever had happened to "Gentleman George"—whether he had been bumped off, was being held prisoner, or enjoying his portion of the swag—Costigan was evidently not inclined to investigate until after the expiration of what he deemed a reasonable time. And without his help there was little I could hope to accomplish. He must have read my predicament in the expression of my face.

"It'll come out all right, Daly," he volunteered. "I know George, an' he ain't the kind to be outwitted by no Russian Jew; he's been in the business ever since he was a kid, and, believe me, he's as wise as they make 'em. Let's have a drink, an' we'll call it off for to-night. You leave me your telephone number, an' if anything happens I'll let you know."

I took a taxi back to the hotel, feeling restless and dissatisfied, yet unable to decide on any definite action. The various threads seemed to be slipping from my hands, and the mystery becoming darker with every fresh discovery. Here was a new element suddenly thrown into the measure, overturning all my

former theories, and leaving me utterly unable to solve the perplexing problem—Ivan Waldron.

As I asked for my key, the clerk handed it over, together with a card in the box, which I read in bewilderment. "Mr. Philip Severn, C-145. Call Hotel McAlpin." Could this be Harris, endeavoring to reach me privately with some message? or was it merely an acquaintance who had learned of my presence in the city? The latter supposition was hardly probable; unquestionably it would prove to be Harris. I found the McAlpin exchange number in the telephone book and gained connection, my pulses throbbing with excitement. A woman's voice answered.

"The McAlpin."

"This is Philip Severn. You left a call here at the hotel for me."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Severn; just a moment, please; hold the wire."

I stood with the receiver at my ear, eager, wondering what was about to develop.

"Mr. Severn?" another woman's voice.

"Yes."

"I am requested to ask you to come at once to the parlor of the McAlpin, on the mezzanine floor—a friend wishes to see you."

"But really, I do not recognize your voice."

"Which is not altogether strange, as I am only the clerk on this floor. I am making this request in behalf of a guest."

"A man or a woman, may I ask?"

She laughed good-humoredly.

"Really I am not at liberty to say. There is only one certain way in which to satisfy your curiosity."

"You were instructed not to answer? Is that it?"

"I was told to say just what I have said, and no more. You will come?"

"Yes, of course——"

Before I had really finished my sentence the connection had been severed. However, there was no doubt now in my mind but that it was Harris. He had chosen this busy and highly respectable spot as best adapted for an exchange of confidences, and had taken every precaution to conceal his identity, not even permitting his own voice to be heard over the 'phone. I took the subway, and was at the entrance within twenty minutes, eager to learn what had actually transpired during the past twelve hours. Without using the elevator I passed up the marble stairs to the mezzanine floor, pausing in uncertainty at the top to look about in search of some familiar face. A number of people were congregated about the railed opening looking down into the lobby, while others were scattered around on convenient divans, or at small writing desks. From the recesses of the ladies' room at the left came the strains of piano music, and the sound of a soprano voice singing. The song ceased to a clapping of hands. The faces I was able to distinguish were all strange, and I moved forward in search.

I had attained the opposite side of the room before I came to a halt, suddenly arrested by a vision as startling as unexpected. Leaning over the rail, gaz-

ing intently down on the jostling crowd in the lobby below, apparently unconscious of all else, was Marie Gessler. There could be no doubt; I stood motionless, looking at her intently, satisfying myself that I could not be deceived. No. It was certainly the same girl I had talked with the evening before, dressed more elaborately, changed somewhat in appearance by a more careful toilet, yet assuredly the same. She must have felt the intensity of my stare, and thus sensed my presence, for she suddenly looked about with a little start, saw me instantly, and arose to her feet. There was a second of hesitation, barely perceptible, before she ventured a step forward, her lips smiling, her gloved hand held out.

"You were very nice to come," she exclaimed quietly. "Especially in response to so ungracious a message of invitation."

"It was you then who sent for me?"

"Of course, and I even dreamed you would guess who your mysterious caller was. Did you imagine some one else?"

"I came rather blindly," I admitted, unwilling to mention Harris. "Your messenger refused to satisfy my curiosity even to the extent of telling the sex of the one calling."

She laughed, quite at her ease now, and seemingly amused.

"She was duly warned. I confess I feared you might hesitate to respond if you once knew what awaited you."

"No fear of that."

"But I did not know," her voice more earnest, her eyes on my face questioningly. "Our meeting before was not very conventional, and—well I hardly appeared one you would care to associate with under other circumstances—in a place like this, for instance. You have not thought very well of me, have you?"

"I have been mystified; you seem to be two distinct personalities. I would have come, however, under whatever conditions you chose to name."

"Yes, now I believe you would. Let us go over there in the corner where we can talk without being overheard—there are two vacant chairs."

We reached there, and seated ourselves in silence. I felt the necessity of restraint, the desire to permit her to lead the conversation in whatever direction she thought best. Assuredly she had sent for me with no idle purpose, and I would content myself with listening. She appeared younger in the bright light, her face even more attractive than in my memory. Again our eyes met, and I felt the quick throb of my heart. The red lips laughed once more.

"You are thoroughly puzzled, are you not?" she asked gayly. "Well, so was I, last night. It is only right I should pay you back in your own coin; that is perfectly fair, I am sure. Now I know who you are, but I am still an enigma. You accepted me on blind faith before; I wonder if you are willing to do it again?"

"I can hardly refuse."

"Answered like a gentleman. But suppose I tell you nothing, and yet ask of you a dangerous service?

would you risk your life for me, not even asking who I am, or why I make the request?"

There was a grave earnestness to the voice, an entreaty in the eyes not to be ignored. This was no idle question to be thrust aside with a smile. She was serious, anxious for the answer.

"I believe I can make the pledge—to you," I replied soberly. "It is very unusual, but——"

"But you are Philip Severn," she interrupted, with an expressive gesture. "Had you not been I would have never asked."

"It is very nice of you to put it in that way, I am sure, but how do you chance to know that I am Philip Severn?"

"Suppose I insist that also is my secret? Yet surely you could not believe I would be here with you, unless I knew? You must have faith in me, in spite of all."

"Undoubtedly I do. I hardly hold it a reasonable faith, however. More, a certain amount of curiosity should be gratified, especially when a young lady asks unquestioning devotion to an unknown cause. You admit that?"

"Your position is unanswerable. I will tell you all I can, but that may not be much."

I glanced about to be sure we were beyond earshot of others. As I faced her again, her smile was encouraging.

CHAPTER XVI: THE DAGGER HAT-PIN

"YOU mean I am to question you?"

"You may try, but I warn you, I am a very difficult subject. I may answer, and I may not. If I refuse, still you must pretend to be content. Are the terms too rigorous?"

"It sounds like a test?"

"It is a test. I must remain a mystery, not from any real desire to conceal my identity from you, but because of a duty to others. Now I will tell you all I can."

"You greet me as Philip Severn to-night, yet last evening I told you my name was Harry Daly. How did you know I lied? and how did you discover who I really was?"

Her eyes sparkled with enjoyment.

"I knew that would be your first question. The answer is extremely simple. Did you wonder why I held that door closely shut while we spoke together? Why I did not instantly denounce you to those men in the other room? Oh, you did! You knew you were there surreptitiously, in disguise, under a false name, masquerading as a friend of that fellow Horner. You knew it—well, so did I."

"But how could you know that? What gave you such a suspicion? And, knowing it, why should you desire to protect me?"

"I'll waive your last question; that can wait its own answer." She leaned toward me, and her extended hand touched a ring I wore.

"Because men who wear a Yale signet of 1899 are not going to be connected with that kind of a gang," she said gravely. "At heart I believed so, and had the courage to act on my belief. It chanced that I saw that, before my eyes even scanned your face. It decided my action."

"But," I exclaimed, bewildered, glancing from the stone back into her eyes, which were no longer smiling, but very earnest, "how did you recognize the signet?"

"My brother wears one."

"Your brother! in my class? You will not tell me his name?"

"No, Mr. Severn. I have reason to believe you know him very well, or did a few years ago. However, that was why I trusted you so suddenly. Of course I did not know who you were then—only that you were one of his class. I felt convinced no thief, no traitor, no plotter of revolution would openly wear that ring. I pinned my faith on the honor of old Yale. That is why I kept silent, and asked you to call at 247 Le Compte Street."

"I did call," rather indignantly. "And was informed there was no 'Miss Conrad' residing in the house."

Her face brightened again into a smile.

"I suspected you might make some such discovery. Yet your coming was appreciated; it afforded me the

opportunity I sought to discover where you were stopping, and under what name you registered. To confess the truth, this was my sole object in the sudden invention of Miss Conrad."

"Then there is no such person?"

"I would hardly go as far as that; undoubtedly there is; in fact, I know a very estimable stenographer by that name, but she does not reside on Le Compte Street."

"But how could my inquiry there have brought you the information desired? I was not asked my name."

"A boy got into the car with you at the corner, did he not—a Jewish boy? You paid no attention to him after that; you had no conception that he got off also where you did, and was not far behind you when you entered the hotel. He did not remain long, merely long enough to assure himself that you were given a key from the box, and went upstairs. That proved you to be a registered guest. Ten minutes later he met me outside, and told me what he had learned. Then I paid him, and he went away. Not at all complicated, you see."

"No, but even then your information was incomplete."

"Yet I found it quite easy to fill in the details. Do you recall your class picture, with the names printed below? I copied those names—it was quite a task—and, in a way, memorized them. At least I obtained a certain familiarity with each one, so as to recognize it at once. With these in mind I ran back over the hotel register until I came to 'Philip Severn, Wash-

ington, D. C., G-145.' Then I knew I had found you."

She laughed softly. "It was a remarkable relief to thus be assured I had chosen wisely."

"And your object was to request my aid?"

"Yes, it was altogether selfish."

"Then you did not return to Washington?"

"There was really no need. Besides, circumstances compelled me to change my plans."

The answer instantly brought back to my mind what those circumstances might be. Her immediate presence, her ease of manner, and happy mode of speech, had for the moment obliterated the dark crime with which she was associated. Now the memory returned in all its repugnance. I could not keep my lips silent.

"You know of Alva's death, I presume?" I asked, endeavoring to put the question carelessly.

Her lips were grave again, but her clear eyes met mine frankly.

"I read what the papers said. It was very terrible. Who do you suppose did it?"

"The police seem to have no clew," I answered, astounded by her calmness. "I wondered if you knew anything? He asked you to ride down with him, did he not?"

"Why, yes, he did make such a suggestion, but I never liked the man. Of course, I only met him that night—you remember in the saloon, but he was very disagreeable even during the short time we were together."

"Forward, you mean?"

"Not exactly; more the natural foreign insolence toward women; a lack of respect to be felt rather than expressed. Perhaps he had reason under the circumstances to hold me cheaply. Nevertheless, I resented it, and would not have ridden alone with him at that hour for worlds. Mr. Krantz and I came downtown together on a street car—he was the old man, you may remember. I asked him to escort me."

"I am very glad to hear you say that."

"Glad! Why, what do you mean?" her eyes widened, with sudden apprehension. "You did not suppose I was with Alva when he was murdered, did you? How could you think anything like that?"

"Yet is it so strange after all?" I defended, rather indignantly. "In a way it seemed impossible enough to connect you even indirectly with such a crime. But I have only known you as an associate with these men. In truth, I know very little more regarding you, even now. You meet them secretly, bearing credentials and orders from high Junta conspirators, who are plotting against the very life of their country. You know their plans, and are aiding them. I know enough of this kind of political character to be aware that these plotters would hesitate at nothing to achieve their ends—not even murder. Why, under such conditions should I make an exception in your case—merely because you are a woman?"

She lifted her hand, as though to ward off a physical blow.

"So you actually believed me capable of that atroc-

ity? Perhaps you are justified, if you think me a Chilean."

"Are you not?"

"No, I am not Chilean, Mr. Severn. I am an American girl, as loyal to my country as my ancestors. I tell you that, but at present I will say no more. But please do not think such things of me; do not say such things. I was not with Alva in his car. I know nothing of what occurred after I left that meeting which was before he departed. Will you accept my word for this?"

"I certainly do, more gladly than you dream."

"Then let us talk no more about it," she glanced at her wrist-watch. "We can not loiter here much longer. You have a story to tell me—how you came to be present last night?"

I anticipated the question, but felt it impossible to explain fully. I believed in her, trusted her to a degree beyond reason, yet some intuitive instinct left me cautious.

"A mere accident put me in possession of certain information that a coterie of South American conspirators in this country were receiving a large sum of money from friends in London," I explained briefly. "This money was to be expended either in the purchase of arms, or the killing of certain Chilean officials, leading to an overthrow of government. My knowledge was extremely vague—not sufficient, you understand, to warrant my making any report to the United States authorities. I had no proof beyond a rather vague suspicion. In truth, about all the clew

I actually possessed was that these fellows met secretly at a certain number on Gans Street. I was half a day in learning that Gans Street was located in Jersey City, and I went over there that evening merely to seek blindly for further information."

"You knew the names of those involved?"

"Only casually. I had heard of Alva; that the agent bringing the boodle from England was known as Horner, and that the actual money exchange was to be made through Adolph Krantz, the banker."

"You had never seen any of these men?"

"Only Krantz; I knew him by sight."

"Then it was my meeting with Alva which led you to the factory?"

"Yes. I had dropped into the saloon because it was the only place to get out of the rain. Your appearance—the fact that you failed to belong in such surroundings—aroused my interest. Then the saloon-keeper lied about you, and when Alva arrived, it was perfectly plain to be seen you two had never met before. You went out together, and I could not help but connect the whole affair together."

"So you followed us?"

"As soon as I dare venture. The mud enabled me to trail you down the alley, and good luck enabled me to gain entrance to the factory without detection. That is about the whole story."

She sat motionless, with hands clasped in her lap, and eyes fastened upon me. The depth of her interest in my recital was very apparent.

"Then you were not really a friend of that Horner? You told me you were."

I laughed, the absurdity of the recollection coming suddenly home with full force.

"I had to account in some way for my presence; that was the only inspiration which came to mind. It happened that Horner had adopted me, and even given me a rechristening, which I was compelled to accept."

"Harry Daly, the name you gave me?"

"Yes. He ran across me prowling about in the dark, and flashed an electric light in my face. Before I could move the fellow thought he recognized me, and jumped at once to the conclusion that I was there on the same job he was."

"What was that?"

"Robbery."

"The—the English money which was to be paid over?"

"Of course—it looked easy; all cash, and no one would dare go after it by law. It was a good frame-up."

"And Horner was in it—the agent? Why didn't he help himself before?"

"How could he? It was a mere Letter of Credit to be cashed in this country. He had to wait until it was transmitted into currency. Besides, this fellow was not the real Horner; he is an American thief, who has been operating in London. The real Horner has been put out of the way."

"Good Heavens! I am beginning to see a ray of light. Who then is the man?"

"George Harris—'Gentleman George' they call him."

"And he actually mistook you for one of his kind?"

"He certainly did; extremely flattering, wasn't it? I am supposed to be one of the fraternity, in good standing—Harry Daly, whoever he may be. Unfortunately I am not up in criminal biography."

Her glance left my face, and swept the room; then sought her watch again.

"I am so glad you told me all this," she said gravely. "It is going to be a wonderful help when I have time to think. You are still willing to go where I ask, without questioning?"

"I am even pleased to be asked—and trusted."

"That is very nice. Are you armed?"

"I have a navy revolver, which I know to be loaded."

"Then we will go now. Perhaps it will be better if you depart first, and wait for me outside at the entrance."

She arose when I did, turning slightly so that the back of her broad-brimmed hat became visible for the first time. There, bravely displayed, was the ornamental dagger hilt I had believed hidden in my valise at the hotel. The sight of it there vanished my last suspicion.

CHAPTER XVII: PEROND'S CAFÉ

A THOUSAND questions were upon my lips as I waited just outside the door, yet when she appeared, wrapped from head to foot in a raincoat, I asked nothing. The pressure of her hand on my arm guided me across Broadway, into the quieter streets beyond. It was a dark, cool night, cloudy but without rain, and we walked rapidly, entering a region with which I was unfamiliar. Here was a strange situation indeed, acting as escort to a woman about whom I knew next to nothing; voluntarily accompanying her on a mission of peril, with no conception of its nature, or the purpose she had in view. I glanced aside at her profile revealed by the gleam of a street lamp, but she appeared indifferent to my presence, intent only upon whatever object she had in mind. Somehow there was nothing I cared to say.

We were in the gloom of the deserted block beyond, when she spoke abruptly, startling me with the inquiry.

"Do you know a Russian named Waldron?"

"No. I have heard of him; that is, if you refer to the agitator, the socialist. That was his wife, wasn't it, where you sent me this afternoon?"

She turned toward me in surprise.

"How did you chance to learn that, pray?"

"I stopped on the corner, at the delicatessen store, and made some inquiries."

She laughed, one of her soft laughs, with an odd suggestion of music in the tone.

"Why, really, you are developing wonderfully. I must give you credit. Well, then it may interest you to know that I am going now to meet Ivan Waldron."

"Does he know it?"

"He does not. That is one reason why I have brought you along. The place where I believe him to be is not altogether safe for a woman without an escort. Your mere presence will be sufficient protection, however; it is not necessary that you encounter him."

"You prefer I should not?"

"Why, as you are unknown to each other it would make little difference. I do not insist either way. By the way, what has become of your friend—Horner, alias Harris?"

"Dropped completely out of sight," I admitted, "since early this morning. That chances to be why I feel some interest in this man Waldron. It was a note from him, left at Costigan's saloon, which caused Harris to leave so hurriedly. He hasn't been back since."

"Who brought the note?" she stopped suddenly, and faced me in the dim lamp-light.

"A Jewish boy, known as 'Sly Levy.'"

"It was from Waldron then, no doubt. I'm glad you told me. The chances are they will both be

where we are going, unless they have already quarreled over the spoils."

"Over what spoils?"

"That bunch of easy money you spoke about."

"But has that been paid over by Krantz? Who has it?"

"The fellow who put a knife into Alva—whoever he may be. The paper says he was plucked clean when the police found the body."

"And you don't know who the assassin was?"

"No. Only it must have been one of certain men; perhaps two were in the affair. At first I figured it out to be Waldron alone; now I am not so sure that Harris didn't have some hand in it. How long was it after we parted until he came to you?"

"Why, it must have been some time," I answered, now that this fact was recalled to memory. "I didn't think anything of his absence, supposing he was talking with those other men out there, and waiting for them to get away. It might have been forty or fifty minutes."

"Ample time, the distance the motor car was away. And then he told you his story, the substance of which you repeated to me to-night?"

"Yes; he seemed in no hurry to go. When we did leave he made an appointment to meet in the morning at Costigan's."

"An appointment which he did not keep; and he left no message?"

"None."

"You still believe he mistook you for this Harry Daly, and that he told you things straight?"

"Yes," I said positively, "I do; he told Costigan who I was, or rather who he thought I was. What possible object could he have in such a confession unless he was convinced I was one of his kind?"

"I couldn't answer that. I do not know the criminal mind, except that it seems to be strangely warped. I think he did mistake you for Daly most likely, but his plan was to draw you out, learn just how much you knew, and then ditch you. By making you believe he was working with you, he expected to throw you off the trail for the moment—long enough at least for he and Waldron to make their get-away. They undoubtedly had the affair all planned—the money was passed over to Alva early in the evening. I didn't know it then; I learned this later. Krantz told me when we were alone on the way back to New York."

"And so you think Harris lied to me?"

"No. I do not believe he lied exactly, because the truth served his purpose better. He simply did not tell you all; he left you holding the bag, as we used to say in the country when I was a girl. It was the simplest way out."

"And your theory is that one of those two killed Alva?"

"Yes; my guess is that it was Harris, for I hardly think Waldron has the nerve for that kind of a job. But I believe the latter was close at hand—never expecting it would be a killing matter probably—and

then took away the swag. Harris had to come back to you in order to keep up appearances, and there was too much money for him to carry around on his person. It was given to Alva in a stout bag. Let's move along; there is a policeman coming yonder."

The officer passed us slowly, swinging his club, and eyeing us curiously as he went by. I did not turn my head, yet felt certain he stopped and looked back as though wondering what our business could be in that neighborhood. We turned down a still darker side street before exchanging further speech.

"I believe I know what you are," I said at last in low tones close to her ear, "an agent of the Secret Service."

"Oh, no; the honor you offer me is far too great. I have not attained to any such official dignity."

"I rather expected you to deny; but you offer me no other explanation."

"And so you decide to believe that?"

"It is the natural deduction, is it not? How else could you know all you do regarding this case? Why else should you assume such risks? And your speech shows familiarity with criminal society."

She laughed again, clearly amused by this last remark.

"You mean I am slangy! Alas, how true! Convicted out of my own mouth. Very well, Mr. Severn, I shall let you have it your own way. You deserve reward; only, pray, never suggest this theory to any one else. Let it remain our secret, will you?"

"Your mockery does not change my mind."

"I had no expectation that it would; neither does it bring me a salary. But, seriously, forget all this raillery to-night, and remember only that you are with Marie Gessler. Whatever her purpose may be, you are to be loyal only to her."

"I am, absolutely," I replied with a conviction my voice was unable to disguise. She turned her face quickly, and in the dim light our eyes met.

"You said that very earnestly. You make me believe I judged you right, Philip Severn. Here is my hand."

I clasped it tightly, the firm pressure of the warm fingers sending an instant thrill through every nerve of my body. It was not withdrawn, and we walked so closely together I could feel the slight pressure of her form, almost resting against mine.

"Where are you taking me?"

"To Perond's French Café—have you ever heard of it?"

"No, I think not."

"I have been there with slumming parties once or twice, with a plain-clothes man along, of course, to show us the sights. It is not very respectable, I believe, although really I never saw anything particularly dangerous. Interesting and unconventional, of course, but I anticipate no trouble, unless we care to make it ourselves. You see the cluster of lights at the next corner. That's Perond's."

As I gazed forward, she drew her hand from my grasp, and her form straightened.

"What am I to do when we arrive?"

"Merely be the attentive escort—but not too attentive, please. There are small, curtained recesses where meals are served to those preferring to be alone. Secure one of these, if you can—a tip to the headwaiter will probably suffice. Have you dined?"

"No. I was going to ask you."

"You need not ask me—I am famished, and this place is really famous for its meals."

Perond's was really underground; at least you descended a broad pair of steps to attain its entrance, and the glass in windows and doors fronting the street were heavily draped, preventing any view of the interior from without. What was overhead could not be determined in the darkness, my eyes merely discerning the outlines of a tall building, without a gleam of light showing anywhere from top to bottom. The front of the restaurant, however, was brilliantly lit, and a colored man in uniform promptly held open the door as we began descending the stairs.

Within the vestibule a maid relieved us of outside wraps, and thus unencumbered we advanced through open doors directly into the main room. This was a surprisingly large apartment, filled with tables of various sizes and shapes, the majority occupied by men and women, either eating or drinking. There was noise and laughter, and a cloud of tobacco smoke scented the air. Near the center was a cleared space for dancing, but at that moment unoccupied, while against the farther wall, on a rather high stage, two cabaret singers were noisily entertaining the crowd. To the right was a line of curtained booths, some

with curtains lowered for privacy, but the majority thrown wide open, revealing the presence of parties within, while to the left a great bar stretched entirely across one side of the room, resplendent with mirrors, and manned by half a dozen attendants in white jackets. Altogether it was a stirring and attractive scene, bearing to my mind no resemblance of any preconceived notion of the underworld. I could have easily imagined that we had entered rather the restaurant of an ultra-fashionable hotel the other side of Broadway.

Nor did our entrance create the slightest interest, beyond awakening the attention of the head-waiter, who met us smilingly.

"A table for two, M'sieur?"

"A booth, please; have you one near the center?" and I slipped a bill into his hand, which closed it instantly out of sight.

"Ah, certainly; the very thing, M'sieur. I will show you. François, the central booth for the gentleman. Ah, see, M'sieur—bien, tres bien!"

It was indeed a cozy spot, with the heavy curtains held aside. A divan of soft plush across the end, a table covered with snowy linen, and already glistening with silver and glass, in the center, and three exceedingly comfortable chairs. The master of ceremonies snapped on the electric light, and stood bowing and smiling before us on the green rug carpeting the floor. It was indeed quite perfect—and this was actually a thieves' den, a mecca for slumming parties, a

rendezvous of the underworld. The thought seemed preposterous.

"It is very fine, M'sieur," I said. "Quite to my satisfaction. You might lower one of those curtains, if you will. Yes, that is much better. Is François our waiter?"

"Oui, M'sieur; you would be served? The table de hoit, François. These dishes are ready—but, M'sieur, we serve quickly whatever you wish."

He spread his hands expressively, glanced swiftly about to assure himself all was well, and backed out, still politely bowing, leaving the attentive François beside me, pad in hand. At my suggestion the lady gave the order, using discretion, I thought, while I supplemented with a bottle of wine, in spite of the energetic negative conveyed to me across the table. As the waiter departed I surveyed my companion, realizing as never before how extremely attractive she was. She must have read something of this in my eyes, for her own smiled wistfully.

"What is it you were thinking about?"

"Perhaps I had better not tell."

"Another secret? Well, then, answer this—what do you think of Perond's?"

"Actually I am unable to realize where I am," I answered honestly. "The contrast from those dark streets, suggestive of crime, to this brilliancy is altogether too sudden. It has left me dazed; my mind refuses to function."

"It affected me that way the first visit. I could not convince myself of the true nature of the place; it

seemed—well, altogether too respectable. I always associated the underworld with roughness and poverty, police surveillance, and all that. But look out there; it is like a big hotel dining-room after the play. Those women—some of them at least—are really elegantly dressed, and in excellent taste, and there is no more noise, no more coarseness, than I have witnessed at the Waldorf. The men are not bad-looking, either, do you think?"

"Well, there are all grades here, now that I look about; yet, as you say, the average is not bad. Probably they will grow louder later in the evening, when they take the lid off."

"I don't believe they ever do—that is entirely. Mr. McLaughlin, the detective who came with us, said this was really the most dangerous place in town from the police viewpoint. Its very surface quiet made it a special menace. Nothing was ever permitted to occur here which would give the department any excuse for a raid. If there was a fight, or even a murder, it was hushed up instantly, and the victim hidden away, before even the patrolman on the block could hear about it. He mentioned several cases; and said the waiters were especially selected to take care of any rough house."

"Perhaps that is what makes it popular with the class they cater to."

"Safe, you mean. Yes; he said they could spot any criminal of reputation in the country at Perond's, if they only waited long enough; that half the big jobs in New York were plotted at these tables."

"I begin to comprehend," I said jocularly, "why I was received as a distinguished guest. The head-waiter must have recognized me as an old pal—my face is my fortune."

"He may have mistaken you for Daly," she admitted soberly, "but more likely it was your tip which made him so attentive. You are some spender, Mr. Severn."

"That depends on who I am with; this is an unusual occasion."

She did not smile, or look at me, but leaned slightly forward, drawing back a fold of the curtain with one hand, so as to gain a wider glimpse of the large room without. A moment she remained motionless; then turned her face sideways toward me.

"Waldron is already here," she whispered warningly. "He is alone at that second table, against the pillar. Step around this side and you can see; the man with gray, bushy hair."

CHAPTER XVIII: AGAIN THE MYSTERY

I COULD not easily have mistaken the fellow; his appearance was too emphatically that of the Russian Jew of a certain type to enable him to conceal his birthright. His back was toward us, yet as he occasionally cast his eyes about over the faces of those around him, I had a glimpse of a beaked nose, and a sallow, dull complexion, which seemed to blend naturally into a scraggling beard of no perceptible color. His hair though was iron-gray, apparently uncut for weeks, and thrust back from an unusually high forehead, so as to give the man a ruffled, unkempt appearance far from pleasing. He was big all over, strangely burly for a Jew, with broad shoulders and large hands, thickly covered with hair.

I moved back around the table as François appeared, and resumed my seat, keeping silent until the waiter again vanished, and left us alone.

"And now that you have located the fellow," I asked curiously, "what do you propose doing—go out and talk with him?"

She shook her head.

"Certainly not. I might send you, but have no inclination to take that risk myself. I am simply going to remain here, and see what happens."

"But what do you expect to happen? That he will choke to death; I judge that is a real danger."

"I have reason to believe he expects to meet some one here," she explained. "I do not know who; that is one thing I desire to find out. From what you have told me to-night I rather think now it may be Harris."

"To divvie up?"

"To talk it over, at least; they'd hardly bring the stuff in here. Probably by this time that is safely planted."

François came back, and we devoted ourselves to the meal, although I could observe her glancing constantly through the opening in the curtains to make sure of her man. He must have remained alone, and busily engaged, for she contented herself with small talk, and the waiter hovered about, anticipating our every wish. At my urging she drank a single glass of wine, but no more. It was an excellent article, so I felt impelled to finish the bottle. Finally François disappeared with the remnants, while we awaited the serving of dessert. From my seat I could see nothing of the Russian.

"No one arrived yet?" I inquired. "The Jew still there?"

"He remains alone eating. Ah! my guess was right—isn't that Harris, who has just come in?"

It was "Gentleman George" beyond the shadow of a doubt, and I reached across the table to see better and resting my hand on hers. She did not glance about, or remove her fingers, as we sat there watching through the folds of the curtain. If she was conscious of my advance she gave no sign. Harris came

down the narrow aisle between the grouped tables, heedless of who occupied them. He had evidently located Waldron the moment of entering the room, and with no other thought in his mind headed straight toward where the latter sat. The Jew glanced up, saw him approaching, and drew partially back from the table, the knife he had been using still gripped in his hand.

His posture was that of defense, of one who anticipates possible attack. Nor did Harris' expression and manner render this improbable. The latter pushed his way forward with angry strides, until he reached the man he sought, leaning over the table to front him, his face black with passion, his first words plainly audible to us above the din of a jazz band.

"Say, where the hell have you been? What is this, a double-cross, Waldron?"

"What you mean?" ejaculated the other. "By Gott! it is rather you I should ask why you not tell me the truth?"

"Tell you! What the devil have I got to tell you? Don't get funny with me. You sent me a note this morning, didn't you?"

"Sure I did."

"Well, then, why didn't you meet me? Damn it, I've been hunting you all day long. What's the idea? Come, blurt it out, before I wring your damn Jew neck."

Waldron spread his hands, and lifted his shoulders in an expression more eloquent than words.

"What a man! You cuss me, but not wait to hear

why this all was so. You sit down, and I tell you. Then maybe you tell me something also."

Harris stared at him, then sank into the vacant chair opposite, still scowling angrily across the table. A waiter paused at his elbow expectantly, and, in response to something said, the thief jerked out a surly answer.

"No, I don't want anything to eat. Bring me some whisky—a half pint—with a little water. Yes, that's all; now get out of here."

At this moment François returned with our final course, obliging us to appear indifferent to the quarrel raging beyond the curtains. Both men must have lowered their voices, for our ears caught nothing of what was said. It seemed to me the waiter was unusually slow in rearranging the table.

"There that will do, François," I broke out, at last, impatiently. "We will want nothing else at present. When I need you again I will ring. That is the bell, I presume."

"Oui, M'sieur."

"All right; then leave us alone for awhile."

Neither one of us touched a thing, the coffee growing cold in the cups, as we endeavored to distinguish what was going on at that second table out in the main dining-room. I came around beside her, to where I could peer out also beneath the curtain fold, and thus gain glimpses of the two men. They were talking earnestly, but had lowered their voices, until they were nearly inaudible amid the din of the place. Just beyond a dozen couples were dancing; the waiter

had brought Harris' whisky, and he paused long enough in his conversation to gulp down two glasses of the stuff, pushing the bottle over toward Waldron, who merely shook his head, and continued to talk excitedly. The anger and threat had gone out of both voices; they seemed to be explaining and arguing together, but only occasionally could we weave together words into an understandable sentence; these came to us detached, unrelated, as the surrounding noise ceased suddenly, or the music came to a pause.

"You didn't get it! Then who the hell did? You don't even know that? By God! you are a bright one! Me, I should say no; why I never knew the old man had even slipped him the dough. That damn girl rode down with him. Of course I do; I saw them go out together; that's why I thought I was playing safe to keep away. Where was you? Oh, you was, hey! Somebody has played us for suckers. If you had kept your damn mouth shut we'd a-had it easy."

Waldron broke in, stung by this last taunt into elevating his voice.

"What you mean, I keep my mouth shut? So help me, Moses, I tell nobody."

"The hell you didn't. You blabbed the whole thing to Daly. He told me so himself. That's what I was doing last night, bluffing him out."

"I tell Daly? Where you git that stuff. I ain't seen Daly for three year. Was he in this deal? Why you not tell me of Daly before?"

"Tell you! Good God, you got him in. I never knew it until he told me."

A waiter brushed past him, bearing a tray, striking against one shoulder as he passed. Harris glanced up with a snarling oath, and, before I realized the danger, his eyes must have caught a glimpse of me beneath the draped curtain. Instantly the fellow was on his feet, all else forgotten in a swift wave of passion.

"By God, Waldron! There is the guy now!" he burst forth. "He's hiding in that booth; I saw him. Come on, and we'll have the stiff cough up yet!"

I drew back swiftly, pushing the girl behind me. There was no place in which to hide, no chance for escape. Perhaps I could explain, but, if not, then I must fight. I had no time but for this one thought, before the two came plunging through the opening and faced us, the heavy curtains dropping behind them and shutting out all view beyond. Harris, inflamed by drink, glared about as though doubting the evidence of his own eyes, but his expression was that of savage hatred.

"Hell, if they ain't both of 'em here! Say, this is rich. So you two are in cahoots, hey? Thought you'd play me for a damn fool, did you, Daly? Well, I'll show you what you're up against—you and yer girl. Come now, where's that boodle?"

"I know nothing about it, Harris."

"You're a liar. This dame went away with Alva in his car. Don't tell that stuff to me. I saw her go out with him. You cough up, both of you, and be

damn quick about it, or you'll never get out of here without a hole through you. You think you can double-cross me; I'll show you a trick of my own!"

He was reaching for his gun. It must have caught in his pocket, though I wasted no time. It was his life or mine, and I gripped the empty wine bottle on the table and smashed a vicious blow at his head. He went down like a log, his body half projecting through the curtains, while I wheeled about barely in time to meet the mad bull rush of Waldron. The Russian could not have been armed, for he came at me with bare hands, his grip like that of a bear. For an instant he had me throttled, scarcely able to breathe, my hands pinned helplessly in the grasp of his arms. But brute strength was all he possessed, brute strength and ferocity. The bottle was crushed out of my fingers, yet I wriggled partially free, and got one hand twisted into his whiskers, jerking his head back, and side-wise, until the strained neck threatened to crack, and he had to release his grip to protect himself. It was all over in a minute, but hot while it lasted; I know we struck against the girl, throwing her to her knees; I know the fellow stumbled over Harris' legs, giving me a chance to drive home one fist square into his face. I heard him rip out a Hebrew oath, and saw blood staining his lips. I tried to break away from him, but it was no use; yet the effort opened his guard for a swift uppercut, and I let him have it straight to the chin. He crashed back across the table, and hung there dangling, arms outspread and head in a broken dish. Before I could

strike again, or even recover my breath, the curtains were thrust violently aside, and the head-waiter, backed by a half dozen subordinates, came tumbling in over Harris' inert body. Even as they stared about, I helped the girl to her feet, and faced them.

"What happen here, M'sieur? What happen?" shrieked the excited Frenchman. "You keel ze men? What?"

"No; they're just knocked out. A little private affair, that's all," I said, too exhausted to speak clearly. "See here, M'sieur," and I thrust the first bill I could reach into his hand. "Hush this up, will you, and let the lady and me get out of here."

He dashed about frantically, wringing his hands and gesticulating.

"Oui, oui! Eet shall be so. There ees to be no trouble, no police. Ze men attack you, M'sieur Daly —I see eet all; you protect ze Madame. There be no noise, no peestal—bien! François, Jules, you will help ze lady an' ze gentleman to go—quick."

The two waiter-guardians held back the curtains for us to pass through. The main dining-room was not as disturbed as I anticipated it might be. The noise of music and dancing there had muffled the sound of struggle, and while it was understood that something unusual had occurred, few realized its nature. The band had ceased playing, and a number were upon their feet, staring toward the booth and asking questions, but others still remained seated at the tables rather enjoying the excitement. As we came forth and made our way down the aisle under

escort, we were gazed at curiously, but no demonstration followed.

A group of waiters stood before the outer door, evidently collected there to prevent any alarm from reaching the outside. To the signal of François these stepped aside, permitting us to pass through into the vestibule. Jules accompanied us, speaking bruskly to the maid, who was peering at the scene within.

"Ze wraps, please. Ah, you hav' ze checks, M'sieur. Hurry, Hortense."

I slipped a coin into the palm of each, assisted my companion into her coat, and then hastily struggled into my own. She was pale, but her eyes met my own bravely, and her hand touched my arm as we went up the steps. Above all remained quiet and dark.

"What next?" I asked.

"I believe there are taxis around the corner; they have a stand there."

"Good; I would prefer riding to walking myself. Where do you wish to be taken?"

"Back to the hotel, please."

In the semi-darkness of the cab I felt her hand touch mine gently, as though half afraid.

"You—you are unhurt, Mr. Severn?"

"So far as I know. Still winded a little, for I haven't had such a shake-up for years; that was really some go while it lasted."

"Oh, I was so frightened—so sorry to have brought you there. It was all my fault. The Russian had a knife."

"Yes, I know; I caught a glimmer of it, but he went down and out for the count before it could be used. There is nothing to worry over now."

"They did not get the money?"

"No, that is clear enough. Somebody got the bulge on them, and they are very properly sore. What do you think?"

"I don't think; my whole theory has gone."

"Harris swears you left with Alva."

"Harris knows nothing about it; you must believe me."

"I intend to—certainly as against Harris."

She may not have been altogether pleased with my answer, for she said no more until we drew up at the hotel entrance. She waited while I settled with the chauffeur, and we crossed the wide pavement together.

"It may be best for you not to come in; one never knows."

"You are actually stopping here, then?"

"Temporarily, yes; but it will be useless for you to search the register."

"I am aware of that; I have no guide. This is not a final parting, I hope?"

"Perhaps so, perhaps not. You do not wholly trust me. Some day I mean you shall. Good-night."

I felt her hand in mine, just for a moment; then the doors opened and closed, leaving me alone.

CHAPTER XIX: THE PROOF OF MURDER

I WATCHED her through the glass doors until she vanished among the crowd in the lobby. My first inclination was to pursue, and explain; to tell her frankly why it was that I had experienced doubt—the story of the finding of that blood-stained dagger hat-pin—and then insist on the faithfulness of the trust which had come to me since. I could not permit her to go away like this; to get beyond my sight and knowledge—yet I hesitated too long, until she had merged into the swirling crowd and was lost.

It was indeed a strange feeling of loneliness which swept over me in that moment. Never before had I felt such depth of interest in a woman, or experienced such regret at parting. With no apparent effort, seemingly utterly indifferent, she had nevertheless become intwined with my life, her presence a necessity for my happiness. The soft pressure of her body, the touch of her hand, was intoxication; the glance of her eyes sent the warm blood pulsing through my veins. She had become to me an inspiration, a memory to dream over, a hope no longer to be resisted.

This was strange, so strange as to be beyond understanding. I argued it with myself, but to no result. The fact would not be denied. Here was an unknown woman, original and beautiful to be sure, yet one

whose very identity was shrouded in mystery. I possessed no knowledge as to her name, her character, her life. To be sure she bore about with her every evidence of birth, education, position, yet I had met her under circumstances of the gravest suspicion. To all appearances she was actively engaged in conspiracy against the government of Chile, in a crime against human life. She was unquestionably the authorized agent of a gang of revolutionary plotters—I had witnessed their reception of her as one of their own, and could not doubt the evidence of my own eyes. She had borne them instructions, and stood in their midst, in secret conclave, speaking as one having authority. More than that even, she had refused to deny this connection, to reveal her name, or acknowledge any other purpose. She had used me to further her ends, whatever they might be, preying upon my personal interest in her, and yet refusing to lift a single fold of this curtain of mystery.

What could it mean, but that she was secretly ashamed to permit of my full understanding? Yet what could she be concealing which I did not already know? The thought of the stolen money, the murder of Alva, recurred to me; the invitation I had overheard for her to accompany him on his fatal trip, and her acceptance; the positive assertion of Harris that she had done so; her confessed knowledge that the money had actually been given into the possession of the Chilean captain; the nature of the weapon with which he had been killed; her remaining in New York instead of returning to Washington. I could not blot

these things out, no matter how hard I endeavored to reconcile them with her denials. I trusted her; I would continue to trust her against the world, yet deep down in my heart lingered a question unanswered. If she was honest, square, actuated by some worthy purpose, why did she still refuse to confide in me? Surely I had been sufficiently tested—and she knew who I was. If she was the sister of a classmate whom I knew and loved, what necessity remained for the concealment of her name? What, indeed, except shame at the part she was playing in this sordid drama of life? Some of my earlier suspicion had been eradicated, for now it was clearly demonstrated that it could not have been her knife which had pierced Alva's heart. Whatever else I might believe against her, this evidence no longer existed, for she still wore the dagger in her hat. Peculiar as the design was, the weapon locked in my valise, which I had picked up blood-stained on the floor of the car, was not hers; it had been wielded in its deadly work by some other hand. But whose? Did she know? Did she even suspect the assassin? Was she even now endeavoring to conceal his identity? These questions were unanswerable; I could only partially drive them back by memory of the girl herself; it was impossible to recall her vividly to mind, and yet associate her with so foul a crime.

I was still immersed in such thoughts, mentally struggling for her honor, and my own justification, when I finally attained the quiet of my room. I had purchased a late edition on my way through the cor-

ridor, and, switching on the light, hastily opened the sheet. My whole interest centered on reports relative to the Alva case, but I found little new information. The police were still completely at sea; robbery was undoubtedly the motive, but the assassins had left no clew! Several suspects had been entangled in the drag-net, and it was expected that one at least would make full confession under the operations of the "third-degree." Alva himself, however, was written up at some length, it being shown very clearly that, in spite of denials from the legation at Washington, he actually held a Chilean army commission, and stationed in this country as a military attaché. The nature of his special duties, however, was not disclosed, as even the reporters had failed to locate any of the other men involved. Not a name was mentioned familiar to me, or any reference made to the late factory meeting. Why the man was in Jersey City at that hour of the night was left entirely to conjecture—evidently no one knew, or could find out.

I threw the paper on the floor in disappointment. I had hoped I might discover some new fact, some suggestion, which might help unravel the mystery. Now I was squarely up against a stone wall; there was no light perceptible anywhere. Neither Harris nor Waldron was guilty of this crime; they were obliterated from further consideration. These two worthies had undoubtedly done their best, but had been outgeneraled by some one else; and, whoever that other might be, he had made a clear get-away, leaving not even a lurking suspicion behind him. It

was the job of a master-thief, an expert in crime—or else had been accomplished through the blind luck of some one whose very identity cloaked any possibility of suspicion.

My glance wandering about the room aimlessly fell upon the valise in one corner. It was just where I remembered leaving it when I went out, yet something, which, at that distance, resembled a slash in the leather. I crossed over, and bent down; it was a slash, the clean cut of a knife, running from end to end, penetrating through both leather and cloth. Whoever had done the deed had been unable to operate the lock, and had used the blade as a last resort, slitting the entire bag wide open. I inserted my hand and felt within; nothing seemed missing, or greatly disturbed. The thief must have been seeking money, or jewelry, and finding none, had taken nothing else. I explored to the bottom, and then sprang to my feet in startled amazement—the dagger I had concealed there was gone!

Good God! what could be the meaning of this? She had worn that ornament in her hat openly, purposely, to fool me into believing her innocent. There could be no other explanation. She had confessed being at the hotel, seeking to locate me, and the number of my room. What would prevent her coming up here unobserved, then, while I was out, and gaining entrance? A bunch of false keys might serve, or, if she possessed sufficient nerve, what could prevent her from boldly asking at the desk for my key, and then returning it later. The hotel was so large

the room clerk would never remember who occupied that particular apartment. And who else would have any reason to thus search through my things, and abstract this important evidence of crime?

Yet how did she know I had it? How did she even suspect I was the first to discover the dead body, and bear away with me the tell-tale weapon with which Alva had been murdered? I had no means of knowing how—only she alone had special reason to regain possession of that knife. It meant nothing to any one else; it was no damning evidence of guilt, no convincing proof. But against her it hung a terrible menace, a crushing indictment. And she had even dared later to flaunt it in my very face, to show it to me in her possession, just as though it had never passed out of her hands! The situation was inconceivable; beyond my power to analyze. Here was revealed a depth of duplicity, a criminal audacity, not to be expressed in words; this soft spoken girl, this woman to whom I knew I had given my heart, stood revealed now in all her hideousness—a murderess, a thief, a scheming criminal, coolly concealing the trail of her crime, and using her very charms of face and manner to conceal from me her true nature.

Perhaps she would see me again—perhaps! The lie was yet warm upon her lips. She had gone away laughing at the simpleton who had believed her, the dupe who had so easily been deceived by her smiles. The chances were she had disappeared already, vanished, left the city, assured that no evidence now remained behind to ever connect her with this terrible

affair. She cared nothing for me—I had been a mere tool, pliant in her hand—I remained merely in her memory as something to laugh about, another victim, a blind, groping fool, with whom she had played to her heart's desire.

I sat with my head in my hands staring at the mutilated bag, racked with anger and misery. I had been easy, a mark of derision and ridicule; a mere screen for her to hide behind, while her accomplice, if she had one, escaped with the spoils. Then the reaction came; the thought that perhaps I had not read the story wholly aright; the faint hope that it might not prove exactly as I had pictured in my first wild burst of passion. She stood before me again in vision with smiling lips, and earnest, truthful eyes. These latter seemed to plead, to ask me if I could really believe her guilty of so foul a deed. My God! I could not answer! The words would not form themselves upon my lips. I could not look, even in memory, into those clear depths, and insist that she had done this horrible thing. It was too infamous, too unthinkable. Why, if she was guilty, should she have remained in New York? Why should she have sought me out, or listened so intently to the quarrel of those two men at Perond's? What could she possibly gain by thus overhearing the tale of their failure, if she already knew who was the murderer of Alva, and what had become of the spoils?

I could ask these questions, but not one was answerable. They merely mocked me with their emptiness. She had said that Krantz had accompanied her across

to New York. Well, that statement was safe enough, for Krantz would never tell. Even if I sought him, he would lie, be bound to lie. He dare do nothing else, for any confession would only involve him in the meshes of this Chilean plot, possibly in the very murder itself. No, there was no hope of obtaining light through any interview with Adolph Krantz. Was there then any way in which I could find her? I would tell her the whole story, just exactly as I knew it—the discovery of the knife, its concealment, its sudden disappearance, and its confronting me once again in her possession. I would make her explain; would insist on knowing everything. There must be some way; to remain thus in ignorance and doubt, tortured by every phantom of imagination, would drive me mad.

Then, shrill and insistent, the telephone rang.

CHAPTER XX: IN THE JAWS OF A TRAP

MY heart was beating like a trip-hammer as I took down the receiver. Who could be calling me at this hour? Who except she alone in this city knew my name and hotel?

"Hullo."

The exchange operator answered.

"Just a moment, please. G 145? Here you are, sir, this is your party."

A man's voice spoke huskily.

"This you, Daly?"

"Yes," hastily, instantly aware of who was on the other end of the wire, yet feeling it best to dissemble until I learned the purpose.

"Who is speaking?"

"The fellow you biffed with a bottle to-night. No, I ain't got no hard feelings. What's the use; it was a fair fight enough. Besides I got something else to think about than a cracked dome. Say, I got some dope on how that job was did, an' maybe could tell you something else of interest."

"What do you mean?"

"I got to talk with you privately—that's what. It's a matter for the girl as well as yerself. I'm playing square as long as you do the right thing, but I know who the dame is, an' am liable to squeal if I get a raw deal; that's putting it straight, Harry."

"You know who she is, you say?"

"Sure I do. Old Pierre, over at Perond's, told me. He never forgets a face, or a name, that old duffer. He knew you the minute you blew in, and he knew her, too; she'd been there before slumming. He got to asking me questions, so I pumped him."

"Who is she, then?"

"That's all right—I know; but I ain't fool enough to blow it over the wire. If you'll come over here and have a talk, I'll spill a few things in your ear that'll make you wise."

"Where are you?"

"At Costigan's."

"What's become of your partner?"

"Who's that—Waldron? He ain't no partner of mine. Say, you must have handed that guy some jolt. The last I saw of him, he was laid out on a bench in Perond's back room breathing like a stuck pig, dead to the world. Will you come over here?"

"To-night?"

"Sure, if we pull off what I've got lined up, the sooner the better."

"What have you got to tell me?"

"Well, there's the dame's name for one thing. I'll bet you don't even know who she is, or how she's stringin' you. Then I'm on to where a part of that boodle's planted—anyhow I've got a hunch. If we turn it up, I'm still strong on the fifty-fifty proposition."

I turned it over swiftly in my mind, the receiver still at my ear. I felt no particular fear of Harris;

to be sure, in all probability, he was only feeling about in the dark, hoping in this way to learn something of value, yet it might be that he had accidentally uncovered the girl's identity, and that alone was inducement enough to urge me to take the risk. If he actually knew who she was, he was the kind that might become ugly, and, however much I suspicioned her in my own mind, I had no desire to leave her undefended at his mercy. Guilty or not guilty, my inclination was to protect her to the last. Besides I was eager to obtain the information he claimed to possess; indeed, all progress on the case was blocked until I did obtain it. As to his boast that he knew where the stolen money was concealed, I took little stock in that. Doubtless he merely threw that in for good measure. But the other looked reasonable enough; she had confessed being at Perond's before; Pierre was fully as likely to recall her to memory as he was to remember Daly, and Harris could never have made so shrewd a guess, unless he had really been told the facts. Another thing gave me courage to go to Costigan's. I was still accepted by these people as Harry Daly, crook. I would undoubtedly be so received, so treated. Under these circumstances there could be no personal danger; I held the whip-hand, the advantage —Harris was only endeavoring to see what he could get out of me; he had abandoned force to resort to diplomacy.

"All right," I said. "I'll run over there; if you want to play fair, I'll meet you half way."

"Oh, I'm on the square, old man, and I've got some

good dope," he insisted. "I'll blow it when you show up."

I returned the receiver to the hook, uncertain whether or not I had decided rightly, yet determined to carry out the experiment. Above all else I wanted to learn who Marie Gessler was. Nothing else mattered so much, for on this discovery all else hinged. If Harris really knew the girl, the personal risk I ran in visiting Costigan's place at his invitation was of small importance. If violence, or treachery, was intended, I would be found prepared, and well able to defend myself. However, I really anticipated nothing of the sort.

The neighborhood into which I was venturing induced me to take a taxi, and, within ten minutes, I was deposited at the door of the saloon. The place was evidently doing a thriving business, late as the hour was, and the street outside was thronged. Night life here was at full swing; the entire block was mostly composed of saloons, and cheap restaurants, and the tinkling of pianos together with the discordant notes of numerous phonographs, made a continuous din. I saw one policeman strolling past, indifferent to the noise and confusion, and a belated beer wagon was being unloaded at the curb. I pressed open the swinging door, and stepped into the brilliantly lighted bar-room. The bar was lined with men, while at the tables others sat drinking, with occasionally a woman among them. Over all hovered a cloud of smoke, and the air reeked with the smell of liquor.

Costigan was behind the bar, but, at sight of me,

rounded the end, and shook hands cordially, removing his apron, and slipping into a coat, in token that he had changed his occupation.

"Better call Charlie," he said to a man beside him, "for I'll be off for an hour or so; doin' some business to-night."

"Certainly looks prosperous," I replied, for the last remark had been addressed to me. "And they are still coming."

"Ah, they'll keep blowin' in till three or four o'clock; night's our harvest time down here. You came to see George?"

"Yes; he telephoned me."

"Said he was goin' to. He's waitin' in the office there. I'll go along with you."

He pushed a passage through the crowd, his breadth of body affording me ample room in which to follow without being obstructed, and opened the closed door with a pass-key. To a wave of his big hand I passed confidently past him, and entered. The next instant he had pressed me forward, came in also, and closed the door; the sharp click of the lock sounded like the report of a pistol. One startled glance at the interior told me I was trapped, and the swift instinct of defense led me to step aside, so that I should have my back to the wall. Harris sat in the swivel chair, with feet elevated on the desk, sardonically grinning at me over a half chewed cigar tilted between his teeth. A white rag was bound round his head, through which a few drops of blood had oozed, leaving a dark stain. Leaning against the wall op-

posite was Waldron, one eye half closed, and his lip split, giving to his face a look of savage brutality, rendered peculiarly sinister by a grim effort to smile. Costigan remained motionless, with back against the door, as though thus barring all possibility of escape. I had walked into their trap, and the jaws had closed.

For a minute the silence was intense, ominous. I could hear the faint click of glasses without, a muffled hum of voices, and the shuffling of feet, but within it scarcely seemed that any one of us breathed. The grin on Harris' face maddened me.

"Well," I said coldly, "it was a stall, was it? What is the idea?"

He laughed, without changing his attitude.

"This happens to be our turn to play, Daly," he returned, apparently well satisfied with his smartness, "and I must say you are certainly some sucker; you swallowed hook, sinker and all."

"Then you have nothing to tell me?"

"Oh, yes, I have; I've got a hell of a lot to tell you. But first of all you are going to tell me a few things. Push back your right sleeve to the elbow, shirt and all."

"What's that for?"

"Never you mind what it's for; you do what I say, if you know what is best for yourself."

I looked at the faces of the others, but they were hard as flint. My hesitancy caused Harris to lower his feet, and sit up angrily.

"Push up that sleeve, you, or I'll have Waldron do it for you. We've got you foul, you fool!"

"If Waldron touches me," I said firmly, "he'll have the surprise of his life, and that goes for all of you. I may have been a fool for ever coming here, but I am no kid to be made a monkey of. There is going to be some fracas if you start anything rough. However I'll oblige you now."

I stripped back my sleeve, exposing my right forearm, yet never removing my eyes from their faces. What their purpose might be I could not guess, but felt prepared for any emergency of action. Harris and Costigan bent forward, intent on the operation, but Waldron never shifted his position. Harris slapped a hand on the desk, and gave utterance to an oath.

"By God, Dan, we're right! This bird's not Daly!"

"Not in a thousand years he ain't. He's sure a dead-ringer, though. Well, maybe the guy will talk now we got his number."

Harris straightened up, the same hateful grin still exposing his teeth.

"We've got your number this time, son," he announced. "Harry Daly has a tattooed anchor on his right arm. I didn't know it, but Dan did. I'll tell you what made us wise. In the shindig over at Perond's to-night, a card-case was jarred loose from your pocket. Pierre picked it up and showed it to me; there was only one kind of card inside, and that wasn't Daly by a damn sight. I told Dan about it, and he was for getting a squint at that right arm. Said for me to call you up at the number you gave me, believing that if I threw in 'con' enough you'd

come over here. Well, I did—and I put it on thick; but when I asked for 'G 145' the operator there named yer, and it was the same name what was on them cards. So now we know yer're a dirty liar and spy, Mister Philip Severn."

"You called me Daly yourself, Harris," I said quietly, realizing the game was up, but not yet sure of their intentions. "I merely let it go."

"Sure: but what was the game? You ain't no fly-cop?"

"Nothing of the kind."

"Then you was after the dough. That's what I thought; you and the girl are in cahoots. Well, what did you do with it?"

I shook my head, but this only angered Costigan.

"Ah, stow that," he broke in roughly, "we know you never got it, but she did. There ain't no other way it could have been done. You was back there gassin' with Harris, keeping him out of the way likely; but the dame left with Alva. George here saw her go out with him. Then the next morning the guy was found dead, his pockets rifled, and the bag of cash gone. How was he croaked—do you know? Punctured from behind with some sorter sharp instrument, no bigger than a hat-pin. It looked like a woman's job, but she got away clean. And what then? The next night she turns up with you over at Perond's, blowing in the coin, and the two of yer havin' a hell of a time. That proves yer were together, don't it?"

"We're not going to blow this to the police," broke

in Harris, as Dan paused for breath. "That ain't the idea at all. But we want a share of that dough. By God, there's enough for all of us, split four ways. You come across, and there won't be no more trouble."

"But suppose I don't? Suppose I tell you I haven't the slightest idea where that money is, or who got it? What then?"

Harris' grin was more malicious and hateful than ever, but he waited and deliberately lit his stump of a cigar.

"What then?" he echoed finally. "Well, in the first place, we've got you, haven't we? Say, you are liable to think the 'third degree' is only an angels' chorus after we get busy. You'll squeal, believe me, before you ever get out of our hands. See here, Severn, I ain't got any direct proof that'll put you in the chair at Sing-Sing; that's true enough, but, unless the two of you cough up liberal, I'll turn something over to the police of this town what will give you a term in the jug, as accessory, and fix that fly dame of yours for all time."

"You are bluffing; you have no such proof."

"Oh, haven't I? Look here, you fool; do you know where I got that?"

He whipped something from out the concealment of an inner coat pocket, and flung it fully revealed onto the desk—an ornamental dagger, glittering in the light, which I as instantly recognized. He read the surprise in my face.

"Ever see that baby weapon before?"

"Yes," and I felt a sudden relief at the discovery. "You slashed open my valise, and found it."

"Exactly; that's what I did," evidently proud of himself. "I cut my eye-teeth a long while ago. I didn't cotton to all your story out there in that factory. Of course at that time I thought you was Daly, all right, but after I heard of Alva's murder I got it into my nut that maybe you was double-crossing me. That's what set me to look through your baggage. It was an easy enough trick. I just hung around until you went out, and then marched up and asked for the key. You'd given me the room number, you know; but I had to slash the grip to get into it. Just as soon as I got eyes on this pretty plaything I knew I'd got the sticker that put Alva out of business—an' I knew where it come from."

"Where?"

"Oh, hell! do you think I ain't got any eyes? That skirt wore it in her hat when she and Alva went out together."

"Oh, did she? This same pin, was it? Say, Harris, I wish I could be as bright as you think you are. And did you happen to observe also that the lady's hat was held in place by exactly the same pin to-night when she was in Perond's? Well, it was; now how could it be in your pocket and in her hat at the same time?"

CHAPTER XXI: THE BACK ROOM AT COSTIGAN'S

HE stared at me, his mouth wide open, and I was equally amused at the expression upon the faces of the other two. I realized fully the peril I was in, and that these men would hesitate at nothing to obtain their end—they were playing a desperate game to win a big stake, and not even murder would be too high a price to pay. I expected no mercy, no consideration, and now they would be more savage than ever, when they realized how completely I had overturned their house of cards. Yet, in spite of all this, I was inexpressibly happy. I spiked their big gun with a single blow; moreover, I had learned the truth about her, and my faith in her innocence came back in a flood. It made no difference what these fellows did to me; they were impotent to do her any injury. Harris had done too much boasting; he had ruined his own case. Now I could fight him free-handed, with a clear conscience, assured of her safety. He had placed the very weapon in my grasp which I most desired to have—absolute assurance that the girl herself was innocent. The fellow felt, and realized, the change.

"That's a damned lie," he burst forth savagely. "What do you say, Waldron?"

The Russian growled something in his beard, the first noise he had made; doubtless it pained him to open his mouth.

"It's the truth, Harris," I insisted. "You have been barking up the wrong tree."

"That's easy," he sneered. "She bought herself another. That proves nothing, except that she is smart enough to play safe. Neither one of you can get away on that sort of dope."

"Perhaps not; but it clears her of the murder charge."

"Oh, does it? That remains to be seen. We know who she is, and that is more than you do. Oh, hell, I got onto that over the wire; the only thing that interested you into coming here was to learn who the dame really was. That's part of her play, as I figure it, Severn. She won't give herself away, but is just using you. When she's good and ready she means to fade, an' she'll take the dough along with her. You will have sold out for a few cheap kisses, an' that's all." He laughed coarsely. "She is stringing you for a fool. Come now, wake up, before it is too late, an' let's all get a hand in the pot; what're yer say?"

"You still think I am that kind? One of your class?" I questioned, thoroughly angered by his sneering speech.

"One of my class? I should say not; you are the rawest kind of a mutt, but so far you've been in luck —that's all. Now your luck has changed, and yer up against it. The sooner you get that into your nut the

better. We're giving you a chance to come out whole, with a fair bit of the coin. It's up to you to decide."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Blow her; tell us all you know. We'll play the game for you, and divide square."

"You will let me out of here?"

"Sure, once you give us the right steer; we haven't any desire to bump you."

"And if I refuse?"

He laughed contemptuously.

"You're not going to; you've got too damn much sense. But just to satisfy your curiosity I'll tell you. We talked it over before you got here, and here's the program. We've got the girl spotted; we can lay our hands on her in an hour; and, believe me, we've got the goods on the young lady. Your hat-pin alibi is altogether too thin; it won't work. Here's the sticker that did the business, and I found it right where you had hidden it away. I can find three men—they are keeping out of sight, but I can stir them up—who'll swear that she went away alone with Alva from that factory over there; that he had the bag with him, and that the two got into the auto together. That makes one hell of a straight case, don't it?"

"The way you put it—yes."

He leaned forward to make his point more emphatic.

"It's strong enough to convince any jury; insanity wouldn't even get her out of a scrape like that. There ain't no defense that'll ever clear the dame, once these facts get to the police."

"But what good will it do you fellows to have her pinched? Where do you gain anything?"

"Time; it blocks the get-away with the swag. That's all we want. See here, Severn, we know where the stuff is planted; at least we've got an idea, but we've got to work slow and cautious in order to lift it. If it wasn't for that we wouldn't care if she skipped. That's why we want you to talk, and are willing to pay you for it. If you'll help us to get quick action, we'll let the girl go, and give you a share. Take my word for it, that's a damn sight more than you'll ever get by staying with her."

"But if she finds out that I have turned her down?"

"She won't never find it out; we'll keep mum. Besides, you're doin' her a good turn, keepin' her out of the electric chair. Well, there's the proposition—you can leave it, or take it."

Serious as the situation was, I could not fail to see its absurdity. This was no threat to frighten me; the fellows meant what they said, although I doubted if they really possessed the knowledge claimed so glibly. But they evidently meant to go on; they were not bluffing, for they really had an ugly case, and could undoubtedly make trouble. The evidence against the girl was strong, almost convincing; it even shook my own confidence in her innocence. The absurdity of the situation lay in my absolute ignorance. I possessed not one solitary item which would aid their purpose. I knew even less than they pretended to know. What should I do? Pretend, manufacture some story? I had no faith it would work. These

fellows were criminals, suspicious and unscrupulous; they would only believe what I could prove. If they caught me in a deliberate lie, as they probably would, that would instantly end everything. I might then just as well fight it out with them now as later. The result would be exactly the same, and I could have the satisfaction of playing the part of a man. I set my teeth, ready for what I felt sure was coming.

"You fellows have sized me up wrong," I said quietly, but firmly. "I am not the kind to squeal because of a threat. You'll find I'll protect the lady, but I'll do it in my own way—not yours. The honest truth is, I haven't anything to tell. You won't believe that, but it is so. I know less than you claim to know. I have no knowledge of where the money is, or who got it. I do not know who killed Alva; even now I haven't any suspicions worth mentioning. But I will say this plainly—I do not believe this girl did it, or that she had any hand in the robbery. I am going to stay with her till hell freezes over, if that is what you want to know. Your proof don't convince me; but right now I can't answer it. I'm simply with her on general principles. I don't know her name, where she is to be found, or how she got mixed up in this affair. But that doesn't make any difference. I am on her side, and I am going to fight you as long as I can stand on my feet. That's my answer, Harris, and it is all I've got to give you."

"You damned cur! we'll show you something!"

"Perhaps you will; you are three to one, and on your own dung-hill. But the man who touches me

is going to get hurt; I'll promise you that. No, you don't, Costigan; that trick won't work!"

I tried to keep my eyes on the three of them, but his movement caused me to step back closer against the wall. I feared the Jew least; he had neither spoken or moved since our entrance, and I felt he had no stomach for any farther fighting. Yet I judged wrong. With one quick dash forward he gripped my wrist as I reached back for a revolver, and flung his burly frame against me with such force as to have thrown me head-long but for the support of the wall. Before I could wrench myself free, the others closed in desperately, content to use their hands, unwilling, perhaps, to create any alarm with fire-arms. It was an unequal fight, yet fast and furious; Costigan went for the throat, attempting to strangle me with his huge hands, while Harris pummeled me viciously with his fists, shouting out orders to the others. I was a better fighting man than any one of the three, but combined they had the advantage. The room was small, and they piled upon me in such fierceness of attack there was no opportunity to break away. I wrenched free from the Russian, and thus got one hand in action, yet that was all. I know I planted one jolting blow straight against Costigan's round face which made him wince, and got a foot fair into Harris' stomach sending him reeling backward. Indeed I staggered the two of them, twisting out of the grip of those iron fingers, and smashing a step forward in spite of every effort. I was maddened, frenzied, reckless of all injury, eager only to injure those devils

in any conceivable way; hate seemed to endow me with supernatural strength, and a desire to kill swept me with passion. All before me was blood-red, amid which swam their faces, and I went straight for them like a wild beast. Then, suddenly, from behind, a blow descended on my head, crushing me to the floor. I went stumbling down as though struck with a pole-ax, and lay motionless. For the instant I must have retained a measure of consciousness. I knew where I was; I even attempted vainly to regain use of my limbs, and I heard Harris swear in disgust.

"What the hell did you hit him like that for, you idiot!" he yelped. "We don't want to kill the guy; he's worth more to us alive. Here you, Waldron, lift up his head!"

Then all knowledge left me, and I went out into the dark.

CHAPTER XXII: A VENTURE OF PERIL

I MUST have remained unconscious for an hour or more. I never really knew how long, for my watch had disappeared, yet it was still night when I again painfully opened my eyes and endeavored to perceive my surroundings. At first all was a blank; not that I failed to see and note certain things in my immediate neighborhood, but memory deserted me. I could not recall clearly what had occurred. Then it all came back with a flash of revelation—the three men facing me in Costigan's little office; Harris' threat, and the fierce fight which had followed my words of defiance. Memory of the blow which ended the struggle caused me to lift a hand to my head, the scalp was bruised and broken, the hair matted with clotted blood, yet I could not believe the injury was a serious one. My body ached, as though I might have been savagely kicked after I fell, and my throat was raw from the pressure of Costigan's knuckles, yet no bones seemed broken, and, with an effort, I could use my limbs. Satisfied on this point, and assured that I was alone, I braced myself on one arm, and, in a sitting posture, endeavored to survey my surroundings.

My head reeled dizzily, and was intensely sore to the touch, yet the brain seemed to clear as I became

active, readily responding to the sense of sight. I was resting on the floor of a bare room of ordinary size, containing no vestige of furniture. What appeared to be a bed-spread, originally white, had been thrown over me, and my head had reposed on an old coat, rolled up, for a pillow. The place was cold, with that indescribable chill peculiar to unused apartments, and through the one window, which was unshaded by a curtain, poured the direct light of an almost full moon. In this silvery light every bit of that interior stood revealed in its hideous bareness, the roughly finished walls, with patches of plaster scaled off, the dirty floor, the single door and window, the rags amid which I rested. It was a hopeless scene.

I staggered to my feet, reeling a moment like a drunken man, and then finally found my way along the side wall to the window. My strength increased as I advanced, and courage was born with it—I was not dead; I might baffle those villains yet. Beyond doubt they had brought me here, and left me lying there, to live or die alone. They must have felt that I was safe enough in this place; that, even if I regained consciousness, no escape was possible, for they had left no guard. A glance without revealed the reason for such confidence. I was four stories up, a sheer brick wall below, and, at the bottom, a concrete walk. There was nothing between to cling to unless it might be the narrow coping of stone just beneath the window sill. I stared at this, almost hopefully, for an instant; then turned my eyes away with

a shudder; it was scarcely as broad as the sole of my shoe and to think of creeping along there was merely the dream of a madman. The bright moonlight flooded everything about, yet I saw nothing familiar; I was evidently at the back end of a house, with others closely set on either side, and an alley beyond a small, enclosed yard. This latter was littered with dead weeds and rubbish of every description, and a small shed of some kind extended across the rear. Three stories below, but to the right, a narrow porch protected the back door. There was no movement visible anywhere, no gleam of light from the windows below me. I listened in vain for any sound; the night was as still as death, not even the echo of a distant street-car reaching my ear. I was somewhere within the limits of the city; of that I felt assured, but beyond this could determine nothing.

I stole as silently as possible across to the door. It was securely locked, of course, and could be forced open, if at all, only by creating considerable alarm. The transom was of wood, and tightly closed; the mechanical devise with which it operated proved rusty, and refused to move. I stood, staring helplessly about, feeling the impossibility of escape. I could only wait for my jailers to appear, impotent to aid myself in any way—or her. After all, that last thought was the most impelling. Those fellows would turn to her, now that they had me securely in their hands. Inspired by the lure of that vast sum at stake, they would be restrained by no consideration of mercy, or even justice. While I did not believe they

possessed all the information of which Harris had boasted, yet there must be some solid foundation for their persistent efforts. That they suspected Marie Gessler of being implicated in both murder and robbery was clearly evident; indeed, they not only suspected, but were convinced that she had done the deed. I was secretly obliged to admit that they had some reason to so believe; that they even possessed proof which would probably convict her in court of the crime. This gave them a terrible advantage over the girl, once they had her bodily in their possession. Guilty or not guilty, she could not establish her innocence; under torture and threat, such as they would doubtless use in their money lust, there was no knowing what might happen. Alone, helpless in the grasp of these unscrupulous crooks, her fate might be death, disgrace. Certainly it would be foul insult, and, if she failed to yield, the desire for revenge might even drive those cowards to a secret denouncement of her to the police. This, however, would be their last resort; they would exhaust all other efforts first. And no one else knew of her danger; no one else was in position to aid her; she must face this gang absolutely alone unless I could effect an escape. It was not merely my own life at stake; hers was also in the balance.

And the time in which to act was short. The fellows might already have her in their power, and, if I waited until daylight to attempt action, the danger of discovery would only be increased. Darkness, and the lateness of the hour, alone gave the slightest op-

portunity; if I escaped at all, it must be accomplished before my jailers returned, before they dreamed that I had aroused from unconsciousness, or had strength enough to make the attempt. Yet what possible way suggested itself? I felt in my pockets; they were utterly empty, except for a single overlooked bill. There was no means of egress other than the window, and that seemed hopeless. Yet in desperation I crossed over once more, and again looked out. The prospect appeared wildly impossible as ever, but I could not divorce my eyes, or thought, from that narrow stone coping. Could I—dare I—attempt to cling to that slight ledge in my stocking feet, even for the one or two steps necessary to reach the next window? The very conception of such a feat made my head reel giddily and my stomach rise in protest. Good God! it could never be done! I would fall head-long; be dashed to death instantly on the solid cement below; a single step would leave me clutching wildly for support. Besides, even if I made it by some miracle, what if that other window should be closed and locked? How could I ever move backward to regain safety? I shuddered at the picture, and covered my eyes with my hands.

Yet wait: there was a way, dangerous enough to be sure, yet possible if I possessed the necessary nerve. I uncovered my eyes, and looked out again, inspired by the new thought. There were opened blinds at each window; they would help some as grasping spots for the hands. The one within reach appeared solid enough, firmly anchored to the casement, and secured

to the brick wall by means of an iron hook. Between the two the space to be traversed was not wide; a single stride on the ground beneath would bridge the distance. If I had something to cling to above—anything that would keep me upright—I might hold my footing on the narrow stone and make the passage slowly. It was a daring, deadly venture, but possible.

But what could I hope to utilize as a support? The bare room offered but a single suggestion—the dirty coverlet which had been thrown over me. This was ragged but strong, and I tested it with both hands and feet to assure myself. Torn apart from corner to corner, and twisted into the form of a rope, it ought to safely sustain my entire weight in case a foot slipped. I started to tear with my teeth, and thus succeeded in ripping the thing from end to end. It was scarcely long enough for the purpose, which compelled me to make the noose correspondingly small. However, with this improvised lasso gripped in my right hand, I took position astride the sill of the window, in an endeavor to project the loosened end over some protuberance of the blind beyond. By holding tight to the frame with my left hand, the right was left free, and I was enabled to lean out far enough to obtain a clear toss. There was little the noose could catch on, and I must have tried it vainly a half dozen times before I conceived the idea of permitting the outer end to slide down the face of the wall, rather than chancing it to a more direct throw forward. This experiment resulted in nothing for some time; the noose reaching its objective all right, but finding

nothing to cling to, and so sliding along until it hung dangling below. The effort, however, made no noise, and I kept at it persistently, realizing that here was my only chance. The moon sank below the roof of a distant house, but its silver light still played upon the wall, and gave me a clear view.

Continued failure left me listless and discouraged. I lost hope, yet kept at it, and finally, to my surprise, the ring of the cloth settled over an iron projection of the hinge, and clung there, extending straight across from window to window. I hardly dared breathe as I drew the thing taut and tested the firmness with which it was held at the other end. The noose closed down tightly about the iron staple, and resisted every effort at release. To all seeming it was as safely anchored as though I had placed it there by hand. Somehow the very knowledge that this had been accomplished, that the way was now open, brought with it a renewal of the feeling of horror with which I had first contemplated the possibility of such an accomplishment. Would I ever dare the attempt? My head swam as I gazed downward, and then across, and I shrank back absolutely terrified at the very thought.

Yet my nerve returned, and I found myself cool and determined. It was no pleasant job, to be sure, and I was compelled to steel myself to the attempt, yet I no longer held back paralyzed by fear. I believed now it might be done, and hence drove myself forward by sheer will power, forcing back the coward in me. I easily found a secure fastening for the strip

of bed-spread at my own window, and then, satisfied that it was taut and securely held at both ends, lowered my body cautiously over the sill, until my stockinged feet nervously gripped the narrow stone of the coping. I dare not look down or permit my mind to dwell for an instant on what was below. Slowly I straightened up, until my entire weight was upheld by this precarious foot-hold. To advance step by step was impossible; all I could hope to accomplish in locomotion was to stealthily advance one foot a few inches, sliding it along the stone, ever retaining contact, and then, as carefully drawing the other after until they met, toe and heel. It was the slow progress of a snail, yet the slightest effort at hurrying would mean a certain fall.

This was not unduly perilous, however, so long as I retained firm hold on the sill, or even could grip my fingers over the lower frame of the open blind, as I was enabled thus to partially sustain my weight, and, even if a foot slipped, the feel of the solid wood yielded confidence. But finally my hand reached out and grasped only the cloth cord, twisted into some semblance of a rope, and, as it gave sickeningly to the pressure, the old fear swept over me in a torrent of agony. I could never make it—never! I would go swirling, crashing down to that death below. It was but a step, to be sure; a step and I could reach the firmness of the other blind; but, oh, the step—the speechless horror of it! Yet there was no going backward; I tried this, only to realize at once its impossibility, and the perspiration burst out from every

pore, as the full horror of my situation suddenly flashed over me. I must go on, trusting to that thin, unstable cord, balancing myself above the gulf. There was no other way, no retreat, no means of escape. I do not know now how the act was accomplished; it is hardly a memory, except as some wild delirium of sleep haunts one when they awake. It was done with closed eyes, with bated breath, with groping hands and feet working almost unconsciously, with a heart which seemed to have ceased functioning, and a deathly feeling of sickness no words can describe. Inch by inch I crept, hand encroaching on hand, foot pressing against foot, every slightest movement an inexpressible agony—then I gripped the support of wood once more, and clung to it as with the grasp of death.

CHAPTER XXIII: ANOTHER PRISONER

I CLUNG there until my mind came back, until I felt the return of strength to my body, and I could look down through the moonlight without reeling dizzily. The blind was strong, firmly braced, and I felt safe in its protection. But what about the window beyond? Suppose it would be locked? or the room into which I opened, occupied? I could not continue to cling there in uncertainty; I must learn the truth —assure myself that I had not passed through all this tense agony in vain. Never again would I attempt to return; better far to surrender, and meet my fate at the mercy of those who held me prisoner. Yet there must be caution still, for the slightest misstep might send me plunging to the cement below.

I moved slowly, barely an inch at a time, each advancing foot feeling for support, but more confident now because of the grasp of my fingers on the upper wood. The window was closed, but dark and grimy looking, as though the room within had been long unoccupied. Its very appearance gave me courage. I balanced myself on the precarious footing of the stone, clinging tenaciously with my left hand to the iron hinge of the blind, while my right endeavored to raise the sash. The posture enabled me to exert but little force, and at first I believed the window

firmly fastened down—the suspicion leaving me numb with despair. But reckless tugging loosened its hold, and enabled me to shove up the sash little by little, until finally the opening became sufficient for me to squeeze through. I felt as though I had returned from the dead, the nervous reaction so great that I lay for a moment on the floor where I had fallen, unable to move. I knew I was alone, the space untenanted, the walls as bare as in that other room from which I had fled. I knew this, and in my exhaustion cared to know no more.

Then I staggered to my knees, and, with opened eyes stared curiously about, gathering my wits together. There was nothing to see but the four walls, revealed in the dull glow of the sinking moon. The place was exactly like the room I had deserted, dirtier if possible, with only the one window and door. I tried the latter, and it opened silently, permitting me to glance out into a narrow dark hallway, uncarpeted. The light from the window behind was insufficient to afford me much of a view, yet I could dimly discern the top of a flight of stairs leading down to the story below. I slipped out, and closed the door softly behind me, being plunged instantly into funereal blackness.

I groped a way forward toward the stairs, guided by a hand against the wall, until the touch of the upper rail assured me of my position. No gleam of light appeared below to warn of any danger in that direction. Undoubtedly, at this hour, whoever might be in the house would be asleep, and the only way

out was to descend. A narrow strip of carpeting—rag I took it to be from the feeling—extended down the center of the stairs, sufficient to muffle any footsteps, and I paused a moment listening for the slightest noise amid the darkness beneath. All remained still and mysterious; so that I drew forth my shoes from a coat pocket and slipped them on.

Twice the boards creaked ominously under my tread, sounding terrific in that silence, and causing me to hang in suspense over the banister rail, holding my breath in fear of discovery. Yet the noise must have been unheard, as no stir resulted, and I ventured again to slowly feel my way down gingerly, testing each step before trusting it with my full weight. At last I attained the wider space at the bottom, and sought blindly to explore my surroundings. The darkness was intense; I could not even perceive my own hand held before my eyes. If there were windows, they were tightly shuttered, and I felt none in my groping along the wall. But for the carpet underfoot, and a small sofa encountered in a recess, I would have believed myself in a deserted house. I knew I was on the third floor, yet there was no curve in the banisters, showing a way to the next flight of stairs, nor could I locate them by any effort. I felt that I knew where they ought to be, but they were not there, and, as result of blindly groping about, I lost all sense of direction, and must have wandered into a side-room through an undraped recess, for I suddenly brought up against a table, littered with papers and books.

Startled by this encounter into a realization that I was lost in a strange house at an unholy hour of the morning, and that the slightest misstep in that darkness might result in an alarm to awaken every sleeper, for a few minutes I did not venture to move in any direction. I could not determine where I came from, or how I might discover a way of escape. Yet manifestly I could not remain there indefinitely, and so, blindly choosing a course, I set forth, feeling a way cautiously forward until I first ran into a chair, and then struck one hand against a side wall. I followed this latter as best I could, colliding against various articles of furniture, but fortunately without noise, inspired by the thought that if I continued this course long enough I must attain the opening through which I had entered the room. In all probability this theory was a correct one, but on the way my hands felt the outlines of a closed door, and, in aimlessly groping about, encountered a key in the lock. It was so inserted as to be extracted at the touch of my fingers and instantly a tiny ray of light shot forth through the vacated hole. It was such a relief in the heart of that darkness as to cause me to quickly bend down and endeavor to view the scene within.

The glimpse thus revealed was restricted, yet yielded a fair idea of the interior. It was evidently a chamber of some size, and well furnished, rather dimly illuminated by a single shaded electric globe, a handsome green rug on the floor, and numerous pictures hung about the walls. I could perceive the outlines of a bed at one side, barely within the range

of vision, and opposite this an ornate dresser, with three mirrors. But what my eyes rested upon with greater interest was a luxurious leather couch beside the further wall on which a woman rested, with some sort of covering draped about her. She lay with face toward the wall, motionless, and to all appearances sound asleep. I could mark her regular breathing, but the only distinguishable features visible were the well-brushed hair, an ear, and the contour of one upturned cheek.

The woman evidently was young, yet there appeared nothing about her familiar, or of interest to me; to arouse her was the last thing I desired, and I would have slipped the key back into the lock, and stolen silently along in the darkness, had she not suddenly stirred, flinging out one hand as though in fear of some dream, and turned partially, so that her face became clearly visible. The sleeper was Marie Gessler! For a moment I could scarcely credit the discovery; yet there could be no mistake. I remembered too well every characteristic of the girl to be deceived.

Yet what house was this that she should be here? How did it happen that we were at the same place? Had she come voluntarily; or as a prisoner? Had Harris been right in his boasting that he knew who she was, and where she could be reached? Had he sought her the moment I was safely secured, and brought her here where we might be made to confront each other? Had she been tricked into coming? or brought by force? and was she held here help-

less to escape? I tried the door softly—it was locked. This, coupled with the fact that the key was upon the outside, served to answer the main question. However she came, she was now being held a prisoner. We must both be in the same hands, in the unscrupulous grasp of this desperate gang of criminals, determined to gain from us at any cost the secret we were supposed to share. I hesitated, but for only a moment, debating with myself the best course to pursue. Should I endeavor to escape from the house alone, and then return to her rescue with help? or face the greater danger of attempting to take her with me? The former move involved exposure of her whole connection with the affair, and I was afraid to take upon myself the responsibility. I knew not who she was, or why she had become involved in this mesh of crime. I feared Harris' knowledge, the evidence he might disclose, and what his passion for revenge might drive him to do, if he once found his game decisively blocked. It would be better for me to tell her all first, and then act at her direction.

I reinserted the key in the lock noiselessly, shot back the bolt and opened the door, stepping quickly within to instantly shut out the glare of light. It seemed to me this was accomplished in utter silence, but she must have been sleeping very lightly, for, as the door latched behind me, she was upon her feet, plainly startled by the intrusion.

"Who are you? What does this mean?—why, Mr. Severn!"

"Yes," I responded quickly, yet making no effort

to advance, "you have nothing to fear; only do not speak loudly."

"But please explain. I—I am not afraid of you, of course, but how do you happen to be here? What is your purpose?"

I smiled, amused in spite of the danger at the absurdity of my situation.

"Perhaps you will permit me to ask a question first, which may sound ridiculous enough—where am I?"

"You do not know that even? I can at least answer with certainty," her composure returning; "you are at 247 Le Compte Street."

"Waldron's house; that possibility never occurred to me. Sounds strange, doesn't it? But the truth is I was brought here unconscious, and have had no opportunity since to discover my whereabouts."

"You were attacked?"

"Slugged in Costigan's saloon," I explained shortly. "It took three of them to do it, but they did a good job. That must have been about midnight. What time is it now? they were thoughtful enough to relieve me of my watch, and whatever valuables I possessed."

"It is after four; who are they?"

"Harris, Waldron and Costigan—some combination."

"But why should they slug you, Mr. Severn?"

"Simply because of my connection with the mysterious Miss Gessler," I explained. "This seems to be the basis for all my troubles at present. Harris had chosen to associate us together, believing we know

who murdered and robbed Alva, and where the spoils are hidden. They endeavored first to put me through the third degree, and when I refused to squeal—as you know simply because I possessed no knowledge to communicate—they resorted to force, and here I am."

Her eyes, wide open, questioning, were upon my face.

"They—they asked you about me? Why should they suppose you know anything?"

"Largely because we were together at Perond's, I presume. Besides, there were certain circumstances which led Harris to associate us in other ways. He claims to know you—who you are. Is that true?"

"It may be," she admitted. "What has happened to-night almost convinces me. I came here willingly, only to find myself a prisoner. Sarah Waldron telephoned me that she was ill, and needed me. I have known her ever since I was a girl; we were from the same town, so really I thought nothing unusual of her call. I have seen no one here since I came—no men, I mean—and did not remove my clothes, in anticipation of being called."

"Where is she sleeping?"

"In the room back of this."

"She claimed to be here alone?"

"There are roomers on the floor below, but I met none."

"But I found your door locked," I insisted. "The key was upon the outside, but turned."

"That is very strange. I heard nothing. Perhaps

if you will explain what they asked you, we may come to some understanding of what this all means. Does Harris accuse me of the robbery?"

"Yes, and of the murder. He claims to possess proof, and threatened that he would denounce you to the police unless he was let in on the division."

"Poof! what does the fellow mean?"

"Well, the way he tells it the thing does sound rather ugly," I confessed regretfully, but believing the time had arrived for plain speech between us. "At least I was in no position to contravert his claims."

"You imply you suspect me also of this crime?"

"No, not that! I have given you my faith; but it has been given blindly. You have refused me your confidence. I do not even know your name, your place of residence, how you became involved in this cordon. You must acknowledge I am sadly handicapped when it comes to attempting your defense. When you are attacked, I can only close my lips, and say nothing."

"You have been very true, very kind," she admitted, and extended her hand. "You must know how greatly I appreciate such faithfulness, Mr. Severn. But tell me what Harris holds to be proof against me. If all this be true, we cannot waste time here in talk."

CHAPTER XXIV: AT THE FOOT OF THE STAIRS

NO, it will soon be morning, and all way of escape blocked. He is willing to swear that you agreed to permit Alva to drive you downtown, and that you actually departed together. This charge can perhaps be answered by the testimony of Krantz, if he can be got on the witness stand, as you have told me he accompanied you on a street car."

"Which is true."

"I accept your word, of course, but Harris does not, and I must confess he has some evidence to create suspicion."

"You say that!"

"I must, to be perfectly honest. I will even confess there have been times when I doubted—never when I have been with you, but when alone, coldly facing the facts of the case. Let me tell you—Alva was undoubtedly killed with a dagger hatpin, exactly like that one in your hat there," and I pointed to it on the dresser.

Her eyes turned that way in an expression of startled surprise. "Killed with a hatpin like that of mine!"

"Yes, there is no doubt as to the nature of the weapon. I know more about that than Harris even."

"But how could the man have been killed with such an instrument?"

"Easily enough. He was struck from behind. All that was required was a strong blow at exactly the right spot to pierce the heart. Whoever did it knew the place, and drove the steel directly home."

"But could a woman do it?"

"Yes, if desperate and determined enough."

"How are you so sure a hatpin was the weapon used? The police reports say nothing like that."

"They do not know; I do. The truth is, I was the first to discover the murder. I have never told any one this, but it is true. I related to you my conversation with Harris, after all others had left the foundry. We must have been there alone for an hour. When we left we separated, believing this to be safer, and I walked down Gans Street alone in the rain. Some blocks below the foundry I came upon this car, bumped up against the curb, and apparently abandoned. The rear door stood wide open, and I looked inside, and felt about, merely from curiosity. My fingers touched something lying on the floor, and, when I drew it out, and looked at it in the light of a distant street-lamp, I discovered it to be a dagger hatpin, discolored with blood."

She stared at me in horror, and I could even mark the trembling of an uplifted hand.

"Like that one there?"

"Exactly like it. I had seen the one in your hat, and remembered. That memory instantly recurred to me."

"You thought it must be mine? That—that I had murdered him?"

"I hardly believe I thought at all. I did not even realize then a murder had been committed. But I investigated the front seat, and found Alva's body hanging over the wheel, with a gash in the back of his coat sticky with blood. Then I knew."

"Knew what?"

"How the man had been killed. I believed then you were with him alone; I had reason to, for I overheard his invitation, and your answer. I recognized the weapon as one you had in your possession. My first thought was that it would utterly condemn you if ever found."

"And, even then, you sought to protect me? You cared enough for that?"

"I hardly know; it must have been true enough. I scarcely doubted but what it was your act—only I kept faith in the cause. I persuaded myself that the man must have attacked you, and that you struck in self-defense. This did not look probable, yet I would not believe you guilty of deliberate murder. I meant to give you a chance; so I took the weapon away with me."

She drew a long breath.

"No one saw you?"

"Not a soul; the street was absolutely deserted. I wiped off the blood, and hid the knife in my pocket until I reached the hotel; then I concealed it at the bottom of my valise."

"It is still there?"

"No; that is where Harris found his other evidence, which he claims connects you with the crime. Something led him to suspect I was not Daly, and he set out to investigate. He had my telephone number, and easily located both hotel and room. Waiting until I left the key, he entered, and went through the valise in search of anything he could find. He came upon the dagger hatpin, remembered that you had just such a one in your hat that night, and instantly jumped to the conclusion, as he had seen the wound, that this was the weapon of murder. He believes we were working together, and this was why I had concealed the knife."

"And you? you believed that?"

"I believed in you," I said earnestly. "In spite of all I believed in you; yet I confess my faith had had a hard test. I couldn't explain the situation even to myself. At first I thought it must be you; then I saw that pin in your hat again, when I knew I had one just like it hidden at the hotel. This gave me new hope, until I returned and discovered my valise slit open, and the dagger gone. I knew of no one who would do such an act—or had occasion to—except you, in an effort to destroy evidence. You had confessed having traced me to the hotel that very afternoon, and even ascertained the very number of my room. It looked terribly bad then, you know."

She did not move or speak, waiting for me to go on.

"Then later, when that was cleared up by Harris acknowledging that he was the one who got the pin,

I told him about your having your own in your hat at Perond's. I thought that might convince him he had made a mistake; but it didn't. He only laughed, and said you were smart enough to buy another, as soon as the first was found missing; that doubtless there were plenty to be had."

"He's right; there are. At least I know of one shop on lower Broadway where they are for sale." She stopped suddenly, with a peculiar gesture. "Why, now I think of it, Sarah Waldron has one exactly like mine; I bought it for her."

"The woman here? Ivan Waldron's wife?"

"Of course; that's rather odd, isn't it?"

"It opens up a line of thought anyway. Could you find out, do you suppose, if she has it still? What does she know about her husband?"

The girl laughed softly.

"Know! Less even than I do, I imagine. He doesn't show up here oftener than once in six months, and Sarah gets nothing from him. She wouldn't know—why?"

"Because, after all, it might be the Russian; not that I think he actually did the job, but he might be mixed up in it in connection with some other crook. If he was he would have to lie to Harris, and pretend to know nothing. You heard how those two talked at Perond's. What did you make of it?"

She drew her eyes together, leaving the marks of a frown on her forehead.

"That they had planned together to rob Alva; that Waldron was to be hidden somewhere outside, and

was to wait for Harris to signal him that the money had been paid over."

"Exactly; Harris failed to learn that the money changed hands, and consequently did not signal. But Waldron, nevertheless, was outside waiting; had no doubt spotted Alva's machine, and was ready to act. The one thing we do not know is—did Alva start home alone; or did one of the men accompany him? If the latter supposition is true then that fellow must have committed the murder, with Waldron a possible accomplice after the crime. If not true, then the only other solution is that Alva picked Waldron up for companionship. Were they acquainted at all?"

"I think so, but am not sure; you said Waldron first reported this chance to Harris."

"So he did; then it is quite possible the two knew each other. That would make it easy for the Russian to ask a ride. Whoever struck the blow was in the rear seat. This theory fits in all right with his actions toward Harris."

"I am not sure I understand."

"Why, Harris hadn't signaled; therefore he had every reason to suppose Waldron knew nothing about Alva's having the money. Whether the murder and robbery was accomplished alone, or with assistance of some one else, Waldron is sufficiently a Jew to want all he can get out of the job. He wouldn't divide unless he had to. He was afraid of Harris that night; he had been keeping away from him all day, and he never got back his nerve until after he discovered that Harris possessed no knowledge of what had oc-

curred—how Alva had met his death. When Harris first entered, Waldron gripped a knife in his hand, ready to defend himself; the fellow was frightened half to death. Since then he's done everything Harris has told him; accepted every suggestion, hoping in this way to conceal his own secret. That is how it begins to look to me."

"Just because Sarah has a hat-pin like mine?"

"Knowing this makes the supposition more vivid and convincing, but part of this theory has been forming itself in my mind ever since last night. The hat-pin merely supplies a link in the chain."

"What do you mean to do?"

"Shadow Waldron; he is sure to expose himself sooner or later. I can see no other point to work from; but, first of all, we must get away from here, out of the hands of these fellows. Could you find your way to the stairs in the dark?"

"Yes. I have been here often."

"Then I am going to turn out this light before opening the door."

We stood in the intense blackness, listening for any warning sound without, my grasp on the knob. The silence was so intense I could hear her soft breathing at my shoulder; then her hand rested upon mine in restraint.

"Just a moment, Philip Severn," she whispered. "You must not feel that I am indifferent to all you are doing for me. It is wonderful to be trusted as you trust, when everything looks wrong. Perhaps that is why I cannot say more—it really means so

much to me that you accept my word without a question."

"I am afraid I haven't—always."

"You have been a considerate gentleman. I realize now how thoroughly this has tested you. Nor is the test over. I cannot talk freely here, or explain; only insist that my purpose is a worthy one of which you need not be ashamed. You accept me just as I am?"

"Without a question, or a doubt," I answered, returning the firmness of her grasp, "and asking only one pledge."

"What is that?"

"That you will not go away again, leaving me helpless to find you."

She caught her breath quickly as if in surprise.

"That is not much to promise, is it! Yes. I give the pledge; you shall find me, when you will."

"Then I am satisfied, whatever mystery still fronts me. Now, let us try our luck."

She led the way confidently enough, moving silently along the wall, I keeping close so as to touch her. Intensely dark as the room was she exhibited no hesitancy, and a few steps brought us forth into the hall at the head of a flight of stairs leading downward. My fingers gripped the banisters, while she stood aside to let me pass. Beneath all was black and silent.

"You better go ahead now; the next flight is directly beyond this, and ends at the street door."

"What is the next floor like?"

"Just a large reception hall, the chambers are all to the rear."

"You will follow?"

"Of course; I shall keep right behind you."

We went down step by step, not a stair creaking, or a sound louder than our own breathing. The staircase was wider than that above, and thickly carpeted; occasionally her hand encountered mine as we grasped the rail for guidance. I reached the last step, warned by the newel post, and felt ahead with one groping foot to assure myself of the level beyond. Her fingers grasped my sleeve, and lips almost at my ear, whispered a barely audible warning.

"Look to the right! What is that?"

CHAPTER XXV: OUT OF DARKNESS, A CLEW

IT was a dull, red glow, a mere pinprick in the black curtain, yet it seemed to change in brilliancy, like an evil eye winking at us out of the dark. There was something uncanny about the thing, yielding me no suggestion as to what it could be, yet frightening by its baleful gleam at such a time and place. We crouched lower behind the rail, motionless, staring at the thing in startled fascination. Then there was borne to my nostrils the faint odor of tobacco smoke; it must be a man sitting there smoking; what we saw was the red tip of his cigar.

Could we slip by unheard? I doubted it, yet, whatever happened, one of us, at least, must escape from the house before any alarm was sounded. This fellow would be a guard, but it was not likely that others were far away; beyond doubt within easy sound of his voice. There was but one chance left—for her to slip silently down that other flight of stairs to the street door, while I remained behind to protect her flight. If there was no alarm, no notice taken of her passage, possibly I might venture to follow without being overheard; but she must go first, her step was light, and she was more sure of the way. Besides, I could block pursuit, by a fight if necessary, and thus give her ample time in which to unchain and open that front door. Once without these fel-

lows would never follow. These considerations flashed instantly through my mind, the blazing tip of that cigar glowing red before me. It did not change its position, evidence that the smoker had overheard nothing thus far to disturb his serenity. The odor of tobacco became more noticeable. I put my lips close against the girl's ear.

"It is a guard there smoking. Don't try to answer, but do exactly as I say. One of us, at least, must get out; you stand the better chance, with my remaining behind to hold these fellows back if there should be any alarm. If there is not, I'll follow. Do you understand?—answer with your hand."

I felt the firm pressure of her fingers in quick response.

"Go straight ahead, and never mind me. Whatever happens behind you, unlock the door and get outside. Not a sound that you can help. Are you ready?"

Again the clasp of her fingers made answer, silent but obedient.

"The fellow evidently hasn't heard anything yet—you better go."

I felt her creep past me without a sound, her hand slipping from my grasp as her foot touched the level floor of the hall. She was invisible, no longer even a shadow in the black gloom. I only knew she was gone, as I bent anxiously forward, watchful of the red glow of that mysterious cigar. The fellow rose up, and stretched, the silence echoing each sound. Would he come forward, or sit down again? I could only crouch low behind the newel post, judging his

movements by the erratic motions of that glow of ash. The girl must be at the foot of the stairs by this time, but not the slightest sound had come back to me from the black gulf below, into which she had disappeared like a veritable ghost.

Then suddenly from somewhere a chain clanked faintly; the ear could not determine from what direction the sound came, yet it was clear enough to be heard plainly. The man stood still, evidently listening; I lost sight of the red glow, as though he had removed the cigar from between his lips, and slowly straightened myself up, braced for any emergency. She had reached the outside door, and was preparing to open it. For an instant nothing happened; I caught a glimmer once more of the cigar tip, as the stub was resumed, and the fellow sucked to get it alight. He took a step forward, and stopped, assured by the silence that all was well. Then the sharp resounding click of a heavy lock echoed up from beneath, like the tap of a hammer.

The fellow snapped on the electricity, flooding the large hall, and, uttering a gruff oath, started forward. We met face to face, both blinded by the sudden glare, although I was better prepared for the encounter than he. There was nothing else for it but to fight it out. If I ran the act would only expose her before she could distance pursuit; besides, that first glimpse had revealed my antagonist, and I was glad—it was "Gentleman George"! He knew me almost at the same instant, spitting out a curse as he reached back for his gun.

"You, hey! How the hell did you get down here!"

But I was quicker, the move ready, gripping the wrist, and twisting the arm back until the torture caused him to drop the weapon, as we struggled back across the width of the hall. I had held him a coward, but he fought desperately enough now, exhibiting a cat-like strength and agility which tested my power unexpectedly. We were both weaponless, relying only on the efficacy of bare hands, but he turned into a savage, a dangerous fighter who cared only to disable his opponent in any way possible. He gave me no chance to strike, nor to break away, but boned in relentlessly, in regular bar-room style, using fists, nails, teeth, and knees, in the hope of winning quickly. It was like battling with a wild cat, infuriated, crazed with hate and fear. And for the moment the fellow had me, driving me back against the rail, helpless before the fierceness of his assault. I could not breathe, or think, making no effort except to defend myself.

Some one was coming. I could hear a voice, and flying steps on the stairs; then a woman's scream from somewhere above. I broke away, getting a grip on his throat, and feeling my feet firm on the floor. He could see what I couldn't, and found voice in spite of my throttling.

"It's that damned skunk, Severn, got out. Hit him, Ivan! Smash in, I've got the guy—quick now!"

I whirled with him, ducking my own head behind his shoulder, gaining as I did so one blurred glimpse of Waldron as he swung full at me with what looked

like the leg of a chair. Harris caught the full force of the blow just over his eyes and the power of it, added to the swirl of my arms, sent him hurtling along the rounded rail, headlong down the stairs. Waldron stood paralyzed, stunned, his hands still on the club, his eyes following that flying figure. With all my strength I drove a fist flat to his face, and, as he reeled, stumbling backward, endeavoring to retain his feet, I sprang past, and raced down the steps. The body lay at the bottom motionless, huddled up in such fashion as to block the door. Without a doubt but that the man was dead, I thrust the form to one side, leaped through the opening, and crashed the door behind me.

I had but one thought—to get away from there; to seek immediate security, and an opportunity to consider the situation. My mind was in a chaos, aware only of the horror I had witnessed, the scene from which I was endeavoring to escape. This was murder, a murder Waldron would doubtless attempt to swear on me. But would he? Would the fellow dare? To do so would reveal everything—the conspirators' meeting, the plot to rob, the death of Alva, the cause of my being there in the house. Yet what could he say otherwise to account for the killing of Harris? He would have to explain; he could never hide, or destroy the body. Miss Gessler had said there were roomers on that floor, and I had heard the scream of a woman. Whatever happened, I must get away, and learn later what course he chose to pursue. If I only knew where the girl was I might

hope to arrange some defense, some excuse for my presence, some reason for the fight in which I had been engaged. Others might have seen the blow struck. But I was sure of nothing, not even that she would come forward voluntarily when she heard of the affair.

I turned to the left, afraid of the bright lights, and the street-cars, and plunged into the depths of an alley. Beyond was a dark street along which I ran for two blocks, then suddenly crouched in an areaway to permit a policeman to saunter by. He saw nothing, but I lay quiet until he turned from sight at the next block, and then moved on, slinking through the shadows, and cutting across an open lot through a tangle of weeds. I may have gone a mile, twisting and turning before I came to what evidently was a small hotel. Here I encountered a cab, an old horse cab, the driver half asleep inside. I hung back in the dark shade afraid to awaken the fellow, yet I knew little of that part of the city, and must find transportation of some kind. An old-time cabby was not liable to care who his fare might be so long as he was well paid. Encouraged by this reflection, I stepped over to the curb.

"Engaged, my man?"

He came to life in an instant, tumbling out of his comfortable quarters to face me.

"No, sir. I never heard you comin', sir. Bin a bit quiet about here to-night."

He stopped, as though just noticing my appearance under the dim street lights.

"Yer bin hurt, sir?" he asked solicitously. "Yer coat's all tore, and there's some blood on yer face."

"A small fight, that's all, in a saloon over west. Any place around here where I could wash up?"

"Sure; right in yere; there ain't nobody 'round to bother. I'll show you."

He opened a little side-door, and I followed down a narrow hallway to a small washroom, lighted by a single gas-jet turned low. A glance at the mirror proved how badly I needed the wash, and I flung off my coat, and filled a basin with water. The cabby turned up the light, and watched me curiously. He was a chunk of a man, with a red, good-humored face, round as an apple, evidently delighted to have some one to companion with at this weird hour of the morning.

"They got yer one good 'un, anyhow," he remarked. "Feller whut struck yer must've hed a ring on ter make thet gash."

"There were two of them," I answered, spluttering through the water I was using liberally. "I may have hurt one of the fellows, so you keep still—will you?"

"Me! Shucks, I don't talk about my fares none. Thet ain't business. We git some queer ones, I tell yer, on a night cab. I picked one up night before last down by the west-side docks, who'd been in some kind of a fracas—enyhow, he wus sure scared half ter death. Looked like a foreigner, an' was draggin' a grip 'long with him. Got off at Jersey ferry, I reckon."

"When was that?" I was using the towel by this time, eying the loquacious speaker over the edge.

"Night afore last."

"Yes, but what time?"

"'Bout midnight; I'd hed a fare down thet way, an' wus drivin' back empty, when he hollered to me to stop. Gosh, the feller tumbled in like there was a ghost after him, an' sed I wus ter drive like hell."

"What makes you think he was foreign?"

"The cut of his jib mostly; then he didn't git his English just right—excited, I reckon—an' once he ripped off a word er two I sorter took ter be Russian or Polish."

"Had a grip with him, did he?"

"Yep; black, 'bout medium size. The fellow wasn't overly big himself, an' it wus quite a lug for him; it bumped against his legs when he toted it. I wouldn't a thought nuthin' more 'bout it, only I got hol' of a paper, an' read how there wus a guy croaked that same night over in Jersey. It sorter made me think o' this feller, just because he wus so damned scared. It wus sorter funny where he had me set him down, too, after midnight thet way."

"Where was that?"

"Colmar Buildin' on Broad Street. Wa'n't a darn light from top to bottom. He didn't let me pull up there—not by a damn sight. I had ter let him out a block away, around the corner. But somehow I sorter wanted ter know just where the bloke went, so I slipped off the box, an' took a peek. He turned in there, where it wus blacker than a stack o' black cats,

an' thet's the last I seen of him. S'pose he wus the duck who did that job, sir?"

"He might have been, of course. Did you report it to the police?"

"Lord, no; if us fellers told the cops half we know they wouldn't get no sleep at all. I ain't sed nothin' to nobody. Only pickin' you up yere just now sorter made me think of the cuss again. Ready to go now, sir?"

CHAPTER XXVI: IN THE COLMAR BUILDING

HIS horse was not a fast traveler, yet this afforded me time to think over my own situation, as well as this clew so unconsciously furnished me by the loquacious driver. Here was something to start on, at least, revealing a new angle, and yielding a measure of hope. The chances were that this mysterious passenger of two nights before had no connection with the Alva case; yet there remained a possibility. The hour, the place, his evident fear of pursuit, his eager desire to get out of sight, the heavy bag he carried, and his being a foreigner of some kind, all combined to stimulate my suspicion. Who the fellow could be was beyond guess. No one answering that description had yet been considered; perhaps that was why we had been led so far astray. The Colmar Building! My recollection of the place was vague, a huge pile on Broad near Wall, devoted largely to brokers' offices, absolutely deserted at night, except by scrubwomen and a watchman or two. A tenant might slip in at such an hour, yet he would be fortunate indeed to escape the observation of some one along the halls, or on the staircase. I felt confident a careful questioning among the night employees would give some line on the identity of the man, even if there should prove no other means of locating him. I would make the trial anyway, as soon

as I had decided my own immediate course of action; that must be figured out first.

A faint glimmer of dawn was in the air, and the streets we traversed were almost completely deserted. Occasionally a taxi passed, and I could hear street-cars in the distance, with here and there a belated pedestrian homeward bound. A policeman yawned on a corner curiously watching us go by, and a porter was sweeping out a saloon. Even night-life had died out in this vacant hour between night and day. It was like a ghost city, yet as I stared rather dumbly at these things, and the broad back of the driver in front, his horse plodding steadily over the smooth pavement, I was conscious of being able to think clearly—the first paralyzing effect of fear was passing away. One thing was settled; I must go back to the hotel. If I was to pay my bill and depart I would lose all connection with Marie Gessler; she would then possess no means of finding me. I could not seek her, but she possessed my address, and must surely endeavor to communicate with me before night. The only thing, then, was to remain and wait for her to call. Yet this surely exposed me to the danger of arrest, if Waldron named me to the police in connection with the death of Harris. He probably was not aware of where I was stopping, but he knew my name, had doubtless recognized me, and Costigan would very easily supply the address.

Yet by this time I was firmly convinced that the Russian would either lie outright in the affair—claiming that Harris' injuries had resulted wholly from a

fall downstairs in the dark—or else would swear them upon some unknown invader, who had escaped after knocking him senseless. The latter explanation was far most likely, owing to the presence of others when I struck that final blow, and disappeared. Unless one of these chanced to see what actually occurred, he would possess witnesses to sustain this story. Certainly he would never reveal the truth, unless compelled to do so. To do so would queer his whole game.

That is, it would if his game was anything as I had doped it out. If he, working alone, or with some accomplice, as now appeared more probable, had been concerned in the Alva murder, his main object at present would assuredly be to escape detection, and get a division of the spoils. His one desire would be to remain out of sight, and in order to do this he must shield me from arrest. That appeared clear and reasonable enough, and the simplest manner in which this end might be attained was to shift this later crime onto some unknown assailant.

I became so thoroughly convinced this would be what would occur that the immediate sense of danger left me, and arrived at the hotel in fairly good spirits. It was already gray dawn, with signs visible that the great city was awakening to a new day. A sleepy clerk handed out my key as though the arrival of a guest at this hour aroused no interest, and the elevator boy was so deeply immersed in an early edition of a morning newspaper as to give me no attention. I locked the door, and, without undressing, flung

myself across the bed, almost instantly dropping asleep.

I awoke at eleven, rested and with a clear brain. Nothing had occurred to disturb me, and, as I looked at the watch and realized the hour, felt no longer a doubt but what Waldron had found some way in which to protect us both. It was a disappointment that the girl had not yet telephoned, but probably she would before night. If there was any mention of the affair in the papers, she would be sure to see it, and feel anxious to hear my version. With these thoughts in mind, and eager to look over the noon edition myself, I dressed rather hurriedly, and descended to the lobby. The paper secured contained barely a stickful, devoid of particulars. "Gentleman George" Harris, well known to the police, had been found dead in the hallway of a rooming house on Le Compte Street, operated by Mrs. Sarah Waldron. His head was crushed in by the blow of a heavy club, and he had fallen the full length of the stairs. It is believed to have been a thieves' quarrel from the evidence of those in the house, who heard the sounds of a struggle, and saw a strange man escape through the front door. There were no arrests, although the police were searching for certain parties who might be implicated.

So far so good; but now what about the Russian? He had evidently escaped suspicion, yet would be far from easy in his own mind. The situation in which he found himself would only serve to increase his desire to secure the money, and get safely away while

the going was good. If he actually knew where such money was to be had, he would scarcely delay seeking it. If he had personally hidden that bag of currency taken from Alva, he would be after the stuff within twenty-four hours; while if another held it, he would as surely seek the fellow out, and demand his share. This gave me two lines to follow; I might locate Waldron, and shadow him; or I might see what discoveries I could make in the Colmar Building. The Jew would probably be suspicious and hard to follow unseen. He would imagine the police might be on his trail, and watch every sign. The better chance therefore seemed to me lay in Broad Street. I ate a deliberate lunch, planning how best to proceed, and hoping some bellboy would call me to the telephone. I finished the meal uninterrupted.

Both Wall and Broad Streets were busy enough when I elbowed my passage through the shifting crowds of men hurrying in every direction, and, reaching the edge of the curb, gazed upward at the ornamental front of the Colmar Building. It was a stone structure of twelve stories, covering perhaps half of a block, with a wide-arched entrance, leading into an ornate high-ceiled rotunda, through which, at this busy hour of the day, a constant throng scurried seeking the constantly moving elevators. It would be useless seeking any one in that jam of humanity, and, after staring at the ceaseless current for a few moments, I joined the stream and was borne along inside. A directory of tenants occupied much of one wall, but, although I stopped and ran my eyes over

the list, I recognized no name of either individual or firm which gave me any clew to the man sought. I was hunting a needle in the haystack, yet persevered merely because I knew of nothing better to do, determined not to abandon the search while any hope remained.

I took an elevator to the twelfth floor, and walked slowly from end to end of the marble corridor, reading the names on the glass doors as I passed. I met but few people and attracted no attention, passing down the stairway to the floor below. All kinds of business seemed to be represented in the various offices, but among them no glimpse of a familiar name. In this manner, growing more pessimistic as I proceeded, I had reached the fifth floor, when, as I turned at the front of the iron stairs, my glance rested on the letters stenciled along the frosted glass opposite—"Mutual Investment Company, Gaspar Wine, Manager." I stopped still, my heart beating wildly, feeling that I had stumbled blindly on the very thing I had been seeking. Gaspar Wine was the name of the man who, through accident, had opened to me the door leading into the Alva factory; the man who had left me alone in the entry while he disappeared to talk with Alva privately in the little side-room. I could not be mistaken in the name, and I recalled the glimpse I had of his face, with its closely-trimmed beard, and oddly high forehead, the hair brushed straight up. Gaspar Wine! For the first time I really believed the old hack driver was right—he had actually picked up just such a fare, lugging a bag

with him, and driven the fellow to this place at midnight. I had never connected the crime with Wine before—yet why not? He was among those present; he had been alone with Alva; he doubtless knew of the transferring of the money; and he answered fully the description of the man the cabby had picked up near the Jersey docks.

There were seemingly two offices in the suite occupied by the "Mutual Investment Company," and each had an outside door, one marked "Private," the other "General Office." The former was directly opposite the foot of the stairs, the latter a step or two down the corridor. The elevator shafts were some distance away, across the hall, while the office space adjoining appeared to be unoccupied. There was lettering on the door, "Railway Exchange," but the glass was dingy with dirt, and light streaming through spoke of no shades at the outer windows. Several people left, and took the elevators as I stood there, half hidden behind the curve of the wall, the former disappearing through various doors along the corridor, but none approached Wine's office, or perceived me on the stairs.

I stood there irresolute, undecided as to my next move. I had made an important discovery, and felt convinced I was at last on the right trail, but how could I verify my suspicion? There seemed to be but one sure method. Whoever had actually committed the murder and robbery, I still clung to the theory that Ivan Waldron knew him, and would demand his share as the price of a silent tongue. Nor would he,

under present circumstances, be content to wait very long for such a division. He needed the money more than ever to escape from the observation of the police. If Wine had possession of the valise he would certainly be called upon to deliver a portion of its contents very shortly. My best course then was to keep an eye open for Waldron; if he came, there would be no doubt as to the exact nature of his errand.

Yet where could I remain to observe his arrival? and, above all, how could I hope to overhear anything passing between the two. Mere suspicion gave me nothing to act upon; I must obtain some direct proof of guilt before even venturing to make my theory known to others. Thus far I had none worthy of consideration, nor would the mere fact that Waldron visited Wine's office be esteemed of particular significance as connecting the two with the murder of Gustave Alva. He might come there for a hundred reasons equally innocent, and while his mere presence might convince me that the two were implicated in the same crime, it would satisfy no one else; would yield no proof of guilt warranting an arrest.

The stairway gave me no advantage; it was open and doubtless frequently used. To be seen loitering there for any length of time would attract attention. I ventured to try the private door, but, as expected, found it securely locked, nor did I dare exert any force, not knowing who might be inside. The office remained quiet, no one either leaving or entering, nor did I observe any shadow on the frosted glass indica-

tive of movement within. Baffled and uncertain, I had barely returned to my point of concealment, when an elevator stopped at this floor level, and three men stepped out into the corridor. Two of them attracted no attention, but the third was in his shirt-sleeves and wore a cap with some insignia upon it. He advanced briskly, and flung open the door leading into what had once been the "Railway Exchange," and motioned the others to enter. As the three vanished, I heard him explain that this was the only vacant suite on this floor, and then another voice said dissatisfied that it was altogether too small for their purpose. They were not inside five minutes, and, when they came out, the agent closed the door carelessly, and pressed the elevator button, saying he would show them something on the second floor above.

Even as they shot up out of sight I was across the corridor with hand on the knob. I feared a spring-lock, but was pleasantly disappointed, the door opening instantly, permitting me to slip inside. There were two rooms, both small, and littered with the fragments left by the late occupants. There were no shades at the windows, and the walls were bare, and not overly clean. What struck me most forcibly, however, was that there was no connection between those rooms and the next suite; they were separated by a thick wall. I could hide here securely enough, and, by slightly lifting the glass, gain good view of the corridor, but it would be impossible to overhear anything taking place in Wine's office. At that, the position was better for my purpose than the open

stairway, and I unfastened the window sash, propping it open a crack so as to afford me a fair view. If Waldron appeared I would endeavor to discover some means of learning the object of his visit. Meanwhile I was safe enough, and able to observe every movement on the floor.

I must have been there for half an hour, seeing no one pass but an occasional clerk. I found an empty box to sit upon, and rested back in one corner, my eyes at the narrow opening. I began to think the Investment office was without occupants, no one approaching the door, and no sound reaching me through the solid partition. The elevators seldom stopped at this floor, and when they did the passengers alighting mostly turned the other way. My interest began to lag, yet I determined to hang on grimly until the place emptied for the night.

Suddenly, when I least expected it, the door of the Investment office opened, and a young woman came out. She had her hat on, and was buttoning her coat as she walked down the corridor. I took note of a pencil stuck into her hair, and felt no doubt she was Wine's stenographer, who had finished her day's work and was departing for home. Then the man was probably still there—alone. The girl disappeared down the elevator, and could scarcely have reached the lower floor, when a cage traveling in the opposite direction stopped and discharged a passenger. It was a woman who stepped out, glancing quickly about as though uncertain where to go, and I recognized Marie Gessler.

CHAPTER XXVII: GASPAR WINE—INVESTMENTS

I WAS so startled by the girl's unexpected appearance in that place as to be helpless. I could only stare motionless, with a queer sense of surprise completely stunning me. Could she be also seeking Wine? If so, for what end? Surely she could have no other purpose on this particular floor, at this time. It must be Wine, and her attempt to find him must be connected with the robbery. Either she had stumbled upon some clew pointing toward him; or else she knew that he had obtained the money, and was endeavoring to make the fellow disgorge. There was one other possibility; the man might have succeeded Alva as leader of that gang of conspirators, causing her to seek him in that connection. I could at least be assured on one point, she had never visited him before, for she had no knowledge where his office was.

She started down the corridor, looking for the numbers on the doors, and then, discovering herself wrong, retraced her steps, going past so close to where I was I could have thrust out a hand and touched her. I possessed every inclination to speak, yet hesitated, and in that instant she had gone by, and approached Wine's door. Even then she appeared to

doubt her next move, glancing around as though anxious to remain unobserved before venturing farther. Then, opening the door quickly, she disappeared within. In that moment, before the door closed, I caught the sound of a man's voice, startled, uttering a single surprised exclamation.

"You here! What does this mean?"

Then a low spoken answer, the words inaudible, and ended by a click of the latch.

What could this visit portend? What was it possible for me to do? I stood there helpless, impotent, my mind harassed with doubt, my will unable to decide. I had parted with this woman the night before completely convinced of her innocence, trusting her absolutely, believing that her secrecy hid nothing that was in any way wrong. I knew in my heart I loved her, and that the strength of my faith rested implicitly on that love. In truth, it had no other basis on which to rest. I knew nothing of her, not even her true name, or why she was involved in this criminal conspiracy. She had trusted me not at all; she had given me no confidence. Somehow this did not matter, did not appear serious, when we were together, and I could look into the depths of her eyes and feel the friendly grasp of her hand. Then I never doubted, never questioned; felt no inclination to do so. I was abundantly satisfied at such times to accept her word, and wait patiently for her to clear up the mystery of life and action. I knew she must be worthy, and my love excused everything I could not understand.

But when I was alone, when I fronted, as I did now, some strange conduct which no reasoning made clear, my faith staggered. I could not help it—I felt betrayed, disillusioned, a mere pawn in some game in which she matched her beauty against my trust. If she conceived that Wine was one of those most deeply concerned in this affair, why had she not confided in me? If she must visit him why was I not asked to accompany her? She knew my address; where I could be reached by phone; why, then, should she ignore me so completely? There must be a secret reason. What could it be other than a desire to share the ill-gotten spoils of murder and robbery? Right or wrong, this was the dominant thought with which suspicion overwhelmed me. I could not find any escape from such conclusion; no other theory seemed to coincide with all the facts.

Yet I struggled against it manfully, loving her still, and eager to discover the slightest excuse which might explain her strange conduct. None satisfied; the very expression of the man's voice in that startled greeting typified some secret understanding between them, bespoke fear that her presence there might be discovered. He was afraid, surprised out of all composure at her unexpected entrance. Yet what could I hope to do toward learning the truth? What, even if I found opportunity? Could I spy upon them? Could I, through some effort, creep forward like a snake, and overhear their conversation? I cast the temptation indignantly from me; such an act would be cowardly, unworthy, never be forgiven. But would it?

If this was a conference of crime my duty to society outranked any personal rule of honor; while, if the lady was in that office to expose guilt she would be facing a danger that might require my protection. Surely her mission was either one or the other of these two, and in either case I would be exonerated, whatever action I took. My motive was one of honor, and service, justifying my conscience. It involved no vulgar eavesdropping, but was a plain duty.

Nevertheless I hesitated, unable to quite persuade myself to this point of view. It was not my code, and I shrank from even appearing to adopt the method of a sneak. Yet I could figure out no other means of ascertaining the truth—of answering the doubt in my own mind, or solving the question of her own peril. That closed door seemed to urge me to learn what was transpiring beyond; I could not fight back the temptation. But would it open? had it been left unlocked? The only way in which I could ascertain was to try.

The corridor was already commencing to darken with the lowering sun outside, and remained silent and deserted. There was no one to witness my attempt, and, even if some office door suddenly opened, I could quickly find concealment in the nearby stairway. I crept out through a narrow crack, and approached on tiptoe the entrance to Wine's office. No sound reached me from within, and my fingers silently pressed the knob, which turned without resistance—the latch was off. A half inch at a time I opened the door, listening for any noise behind, my

eyes peering through the narrow crack at what was revealed within. They perceived little, merely a small, unoccupied room, evidently an outer office, containing a cheap desk, two chairs and a typewriting stand, the machine covered. Two maps hung upon the walls; in one corner was a glass water-holder, and in the other a diminutive closet, the door ajar. A gray drill matting protected the floor, while an electric drop-light hung dangling over the desk. That was all, except that indistinguishable voices were conversing somewhere beyond. These did not cease, evidence that the movement of the door had attracted no attention. The speakers must be beyond the partition and well out of view.

Encouraged to believe this I thrust my head far enough forward to make sure. An alcove led to the inner room, where I could perceive one end of a rolled-top desk, together with a waste-basket filled with papers, but nothing more. A step to the left would doubtless have revealed Wine, but from where I stood the end of the partition interfered. By slipping to the right it would be quite possible for me to enter without being seen, and three cautious steps would bring me to the security of the closet. From there, with the door into the corridor closed, I might overhear all that passed between the two. I had ventured too far now to retreat, and, without a second of hesitation, I pressed through the narrow opening, and silently closed the door behind me. The rug muffled my footsteps, and, confident that I had not been detected, I crouched into the narrow closet, scarcely

knowing whether to be ashamed or proud of my success.

The place in which I had taken refuge was narrow, but of a length which convinced me it was probably utilized by the occupants of both rooms. The door leading into the second office was closed, yet light from the outer windows reflected through the cracks, and, by their aid, I could now clearly distinguish the words of conversation. At first these were hardly understandable, seemingly having no connection with any matter with which I felt concerned. The two were evidently discussing money, to be sure, but in terms involving the payment of interest, and the impossibility of extending a loan. I overheard her say, quietly but firmly:

"I came to you, Mr. Wine, because of our connection in other matters. I overheard this discussion, and felt you ought to be forewarned."

"I appreciate your kindness,'" he answered, evidently surprised, "but simply cannot raise the amount to-day—it is too late."

"It does not have to be raised to-day, but before the closing of banking hours to-morrow."

"I can have it by then," desperately.

"I was sure you could, if I only explained the necessity."

She arose as though her purpose had been accomplished, but apparently the man was not yet willing she should go. He was uneasy, and desired to know more.

"But I fail to understand your interest; why should

you take the trouble to come here and tell me this?"

She laughed lightly.

"Why? really it is easily enough understood. We are together, are we not? Now that Captain Alva is dead, it is generally believed you will be selected to lead in this work. Oh, yes it is; I have already been so informed. And in that case it is absolutely necessary that your bank connections be excellent. There are other funds already in this country."

"Other funds! You learn this from Washington?"

"Yes, and from the bank; all these moneys pass through our hands in one way or another; that is how I first became used as a messenger."

"I know; Alva told me, but I supposed this last payment was to be all."

"Assuredly not; the cause had practically unlimited means under our present arrangements in London. It cannot stop for an instant merely because of this loss. Moreover, that will doubtless be recovered."

"Do you think so? Have the police found any clews?"

"The police! Hardly, but there are others searching, not so easily turned aside. We believe we know already who got the money."

"You—you think you—you know?" he could not keep the tremble out of his voice. "Was—was it one of us?"

"It could scarcely be an outsider, for the secret was guarded well. Only those of that circle knew the money was here even, while not more than two or three were aware of its having been passed over to

Alva. I can't say any more at present, Mr. Wine. You knew Captain Alva very well, did you not?"

"Y-yes; that is, we were good friends; he brought a letter to me when he first came."

"And you have been associated rather closely ever since?"

"We had much in common."

"Are you a German?"

"By blood—yes, but born in Poland; Captain Alva's mother was also a Pole; this brought us closer together."

"The special tie then was not Chilean?"

"No; I have never been in South America. I am a Revolutionary. We really planned for a world republic," he explained eagerly, "the downfall of all oppression; we would build anew on the ruin of Nations. Chile came first, for it seemed ripe for the experiment. Surely you understand that?"

"Of course—International brotherhood. You were most intimate with Captain Alva. No doubt he told you about this money?"

"That is that it had been sent—yes."

"You knew nothing of its delivery to him?"

"My God, no."

"You were with him alone before the meeting."

"We spoke of other things; not once was the money mentioned."

"And you have no suspicion of any one who could have known, and been guilty of this murder and robbery?"

"Why should I? Why you ask me that?" excit-

edly. "There were many there; perhaps all know except me. I could not guess, for I was the second man to leave; you see, the second; only Charlett go out before I do. Captain Alva he still remain behind when I go. I saw him last then, talking with many. You not suppose I know he—he die?"

"Oh, no; I merely thought you might have some suspicion, that was all. It was a strange weapon he was killed with."

"A strange weapon! What you mean, a strange weapon? Do they know what it was that killed him?"

"Certainly; it was picked up in the bottom of the auto—a dagger hat-pin, such as women wear. See, it was just like this of mine."

She must have plucked the ornament from out her own hat and laid it on the desk, for I heard the faint click of its fall. There was a moment of intense silence, and I could vision the intense horror with which he was staring at the instrument, unable to command words.

"That thing!" he burst forth finally. "Killed with that!"

"No, not that; but one exactly like it."

"Who says so—the police? Gott! it could not kill a man. Why you tell me this—why?"

"Oh, only because I thought you might be interested. However, let's not talk about it any more. You will settle that account before the close of banking hours to-morrow?"

"I? Yes, I will settle."

There was the sound of a foot on the cement floor

of the corridor without, and, almost at the same instant the electric light, which had been turned on, revealed a man's shadow on the glass of the closed door. He seemed to stand there hesitatingly; then he rapped with his knuckles on the glass.

CHAPTER XXVIII: A QUARREL BETWEEN THIEVES

I FLATTENED myself out against the inner wall of the closet, aware that the two in the second office were coming forward together, Wine giving vent to a startled oath in his excitement. He strode straight to the door, and opened it with a jerk, bursting instantly into speech at sight of his visitor.

"You, hey! What the devil do you want here?"

"A word with you, and damn quick——"

It was Waldron's voice, but his speech ended abruptly, as his eyes caught sight of the woman. She wasted no time.

"I was just going," she said calmly, ignoring him, but speaking directly to Wine. "You have been very nice indeed in this matter. I will see you to-morrow then."

She passed between the two, without so much as favoring the Russian with a glance, and he stared after her with open mouth, then stepped back to watch her progress down the corridor. Wine caught him by the sleeve and drew him hastily aside, closing the door tightly and shooting the night-latch.

"The damn girl never locks this door when she goes out," he muttered angrily, wheeling about to face the other. "Now, speak up, will you! what sends you butting in here?"

"Well first you tell me," thundered Waldron, gripping the other angrily with one hand, "what business that female has with you? By God, Wine, if you are trying to double-cross, you'll find me no easy mark. Answer, you cur—what was she here for?"

"Nothing, only private business. I swear it was nothing else."

"You promised to see her to-morrow?"

"Yes, it was to pay a note. Come in here, and I'll explain all. There's nothing to frighten you, Waldron."

"The hell there ain't! Perhaps I know better than you do what is on tap. All right, I'll sit down and hear what you got to say, but I ain't goin' to waste no time, let me tell you, in listenin' to no long story. I got to get a bunch o' money quick and get out of here."

The two disappeared into the inner room, Waldron's voice still rumbling, with Wine interjecting a word now and then. His whole manner had changed before the threatening attitude of his companion, and he no longer blustered over the unexpected appearance of the fellow, but seemed anxious to get rid of him in the easiest and quickest way possible. His bluster had changed to wheedling, and he appeared willing to concede anything rather than prolong the interview. I ventured to stand erect again in the confines of the closet, and press my ear to the crack of the inner door. Both men were confident of being alone, and so deeply immersed in their own affair as to speak with little restraint. Waldron, really af-

frightened at this discovery of Miss Gessler, adopted the method of a bully to carry his point, more eager than ever to escape the city.

"Well," he began, thumping the desk with a fist, "now you begin to spill. Don't try to work any game on me. What do you mean by paying a note? You owe her something?"

"No; now listen, and don't get mad. I tell you just how it was," and Wine endeavored to be smooth and plausible, his voice pitched so low I had difficulty in hearing the words. "She said I was to succeed Alva, and be the revolutionary agent; partly she came to tell me this, but some way she learning of my indebtedness, that I have an overdue note at the bank——"

"What bank?"

"Kulb, Krantz & Company."

"How the hell did she know that?"

"I could not tell," apparently surprised himself. "I never asked, but maybe Krantz he told her. When they talked over my being given charge of the fund —yes, that must be the way, for she insisted I must straighten that matter up quick, before other money was given me."

"What other money?"

"That which is sent from across the water for the cause."

"Oh, I see; there is more coming then."

"Coming, yes; maybe some is here already."

"How much did you owe the bank, Wine?"

"Between eight and nine thousand; it is overdue

three months; now I promise to pay it all up to-morrow."

"Oh, you did, hey! out of that stuff, I suppose?"

Wine's response was barely audible.

"Where else I get it, you think? Mein Gott, I have no more."

"Say," burst out Waldron suspiciously, "that's all right, but what bothers me is why this girl should hit you for it at just this particular time. Krantz must have sent her, but what made them think you had money now? It ain't very likely they was just takin' a chance, is it? What security did they have?"

"Captain Alva he signed with me, that was all. I figured that with him dead Krantz thought he better squeeze me."

"Exactly, and so he sent this young woman to tell you about this other money coming. He knew you would recognize her, and jump at the chance to come through. I believe that is all a damn lie; they haven't got any more coming. Only I do think they imagined you might have some on hand."

"How they imagine that?"

"Search me, Wine; only I happen to know there is a hell of a lot going on under the surface. It don't look good to me, they jumping you just at this time."

"What you mean? You have not spilled nothing?"

"Me!" he laughed roughly. "Damn it, I'm not the spilling kind. There's been plenty o' fellers after the dope, let me tell you, but I've let 'em hunt. Say, I've had to laugh sometimes the way they've been fooled. You know that guy who called himself Horner?"

"Sure—a smart fellow."

"You bet he is; a damn sight smarter than you think. He ain't Horner at all, if you ask me; his right name was Harris, as slick a crook as ever lived."

"Harris? a crook? What was it I saw in the paper? Wasn't he the same guy what was croaked last night?"

"You bet he was; that's what I'm telling you about; that's why I come up here to get this off my chest. He bitfed this fellow Horner coming over. I don't know nothin' about how he did the job, but Horner ain't never showed up since. Instead this guy Harris blew in with all his papers, an' started negotiatin' with Krantz and Alva. He an' Alva got awful thick."

"I know; what was the game?"

"To get that check into cash, of course. He hung around for that purpose for weeks, an' then missed out."

"An' you knew him, an' never said a word?"

"Sure I knew him, first time I got eyes on the bloater; but what was it to me? I'm not in this business for my health, Wine. I never gave a damn who got hands on that stuff, so I had my grab at it. Harris an' I had it framed; that's why I was out there, waitin' for a signal from him. But when you beat him to it, I'd just as soon be your running mate as his."

"Huh! don't talk so loud! And now you say Harris is dead?"

"As a mackerel; he couldn't be no deader. But that was my house where he was croaked, an' so I

got to get out o' town. The police ain't wise so far, but they might tumble if I hang around."

"That why you come here?"

"Exactly; I've got to have some rino right away, and it's up to you to see that I'm heeled. You know where the stuff is, and how to get it quick."

"I wouldn't dare use that money yet; I haven't even opened the bag."

"The hell you wouldn't! You are goin' to cop off enough to pay that note to-morrow, ain't you? That's what you promised the girl. Well, I'm just as important as she is, I reckon, and I'm goin' to have my share, you bet, or else I'll make it hot for you—I'll say that."

"You haven't nothing but your own word."

"Ain't I! Say, Wine, don't be a fool; there are others beside us that's got a nose in this affair. The hunt ain't all over just because Harris is croaked. I don't count the police, for, as far as I know, they haven't even struck a scent yet, but there's a saloon-keeper down on Sixth Avenue, named Costigan, who's got all o' Harris' dope, an' he's goin' to keep on the trail. Then there's another fellow who's liable to raise hell. I ain't got him exactly placed yet, but he's the guy that led up to Harris being killed. I'm the only one what knows that, an' I ain't talked before."

"Who is he—a detective?"

"Maybe; Harris called him Severn. First he mistook him for a fly-bird named Daly, but after a while he got on to the fact that he wasn't Daly at all. They got the guy down into Costigan's and the three of us

slugged him. Harris wouldn't let us put him clear out, for he sorter had an idea that the fellow might know where the stuff had gone. I didn't say nothin', of course, an' so they patched him up, and then locked him into a back room over in my place. The next morning they was goin' to give him the third degree. Then with him safe, Harris went after this girl, thinking she would be made to talk."

"What could she know about it?"

"Don't ask me; I just drifted along to please 'em. What made them think the two were together was, they were both eating at the same table over at Perond's the night before. I don't suppose I got it just straight, but Harris an' Costigan had got it doped out in their noodles that these were the people that copped the boodle, an' were crazy to get one of them to squeal."

"Not the girl?"

"Sure; Harris got it into his nut that she left out there with Alva, an' the two being together the next night made him sure he was on the right trail. It suited me to let them think that, so I didn't say nothin'. I didn't want no trouble with Harris, ner Costigan either for the matter of that—they're both of 'em bad actors."

"Well, then, what happened?"

"That's mostly guess-work. They had this guy Severn locked in upstairs. He was unconscious when we dumped him there, and later, when my wife got this girl to come over—they was raised in the same town—Harris he turned the key on her. They was

aiming to bring them together the next morning, but somehow Severn must have woke up, an' got out o' the room, for the next thing I know'd he was fightin' Harris out in the hall, an' after that I found the girl had skipped out durin' the fracas."

"They both got away?"

"Clean, leaving Harris behind with his skull busted; deader than a door-nail when I got to him."

"And you don't know who this Severn is? or what he is up to?"

"No, I don't, Wine, but he's sure got some game on, an' he's got my goat. He's in with the girl all right, and knows too damn much. That's what makes me leery about her being here pumpin' you."

"She didn't pump me."

"You mean to say the two of you didn't talk about Alva?"

"We talked about him, of course; we couldn't help it, but she never hinted at nothing, and she didn't ask no questions. Only it seems they've found out one thing that hain't been reported by the police—she knew what he was killed with."

"What's that! She told you what stuck him?"

"You bet she did; she had one of 'em herself, an' took it out of her hat, and put it right down here on the desk. I thought for a second I was going to keel over, but she didn't notice, just went on talkin'. How do yer suppose she ever found that out?"

"Severn told her, that's how. It was dropped there in the dark. That feller got it some way, and hid it in his valise. That was what made Harris so sure

he was in on the job, because he raided the room at some hotel and found the thing. I don't know what to make o' all this dope, Wine, but I'm damn sure I'm goin' to skip out fer a while, an' you better do the same. It don't look none too healthy ter me."

"You don't imagine the girl is playin' us?"

"I don't imagine nuthin', but I'm playin' safe. I don't know what the hell either of them are up to, but I figure they know too damn much, an' I ain't goin' to take any chances hangin' round till they nose out the rest. That's my idea, to skip out while there's some chance to get away. So pony up my share, Wine, an then you can do whatever you darn please with what's comin' to you. What do you say?"

I could hear the other tramping nervously back and forth across the room. His failure to answer must have angered the Russian, for, after a minute, he burst out with an oath:

"Damn it, why don't yer say something? Part o' this boodle's mine, ain't it?"

"Y-yes—of course."

"Well, then, cough it up! Where did you plant the stuff?"

"It's put away in a safety vault," Wine explained, his voice almost failing him. "Honest, Waldron, I can't get it to-night, it's too late. The bank is locked, and I haven't opened it."

"You're a liar! you never dared to lug the thing around! You wouldn't be seen with it in your hand in daylight. I know you, you sneaking cur. You brought the stuff straight to this office that night,

and, by God, I believe it is here yet. What do you want me to do—kill you, and then hunt? That is what's goin' to happen, unless you come across, too. I'll shake the gizzard out of you, you little sneak, if you try any trick on me."

He must have gripped the other, for there was a struggle, Wine whimpering as though half choked.

"Speak up, you cur! This thing divides fifty-fifty. Where is it now? What's that—behind those books? Hell, I wouldn't believe you under oath. Go get it out from there; let's have a look at the stuff."

He must have flung the other clear across the room, for he came down sprawling, his body striking against the door of the closet, behind which I crouched. The catch broke under the impact, and, before I could draw back, I was in full view of both men.

CHAPTER XXIX: THE DEATH OF A MURDERER

WINE, outstretched on the floor at my very feet, stared up at me, so startled by my sudden appearance as to be speechless. His face was chalky, and his lips opened and shut without uttering a sound. Waldron, oblivious of all else but the money, now almost in his possession, was upon his knees before a bookcase, dragging out the heavy volumes from the lower shelf, dumping them on the floor. From behind these he had already drawn forth into view a black leather valise, when Wine found voice, uttering a strange cry of terror, which caused him to glance about. He leaped to his feet instantly, his eyes glaring into mine, one hand flung back as though in search of a weapon.

I gave him no time. I cared nothing for that whimpering cur on the floor, but this other was desperate and dangerous, and I leaped straight at him, striking so hard even as we grappled that the blow sent him reeling back against the bookcase. He knew me then, and the recognition brought with it a fury which transformed the Russian into a wild beast. Coward as I felt him to be, now that he was cornered, with the spoils of victory in his very grasp, he became a demon, a mad dog, whose only desire was to kill.

"You, you damned spy," he snapped savagely. "I know your game now, and you won't get away this time. Take him from behind, Wine! Club him; he's a dirty police sneak!"

We struggled back and forth, neither of us daring to release a grip for fear of losing an advantage. His strength matched whatever skill I possessed, and I could not break away from the pressure of his arms. Yet I managed to hang on in such a way as to prevent his drawing a gun, and gained a grip on his whiskers which enabled me to twist his head to one side until I expected to hear his neck crack. Back and forth we stumbled over the books on the floor, and the valise, kicking these out of the way. In one of our fierce surges the bookcase was overturned, coming down with a crash, but with no interruption of the struggle. The Jew's hate flared so high he could not restrain his tongue, spitting out the words as he panted for breath, expecting, perhaps, to terrorize me by threat.

"You're fighting a man this time, yer hell-hound; not a whiffet like Harris. I'll blow a hole clear through yer! Sneaked in, did yer? Well, ye'll never sneak out again! Say, how do yer like the taste o' that?" He struck with a knee in the stomach, grinning as I loosened my grip on his beard, and tried to butt into me with lowered head. I caught him instantly, with a free fist, rocking his head back and cutting a gash in his cheek from which blood spurted. He tried the same trick again, but I blocked it, whirling him sidewise against the wall and landing twice

with short jabs to the body. If he possessed any self-control before, he lost it then, crazed with hate and the desire to kill. He was a bar-room fighter, bound by no rules, capable of any ferocity—biting, gouging, using hands and feet, a ruthless savage. It was this which defeated him, for while I was neither cool nor clear of mind, I kept my head sufficiently to remember my training and accept every advantage that presented itself; more than that, the very threats with which he tried to goad me were guides to his own action, giving me the swift hint needed for defense.

"Get up, Wine! Now's yer chance; I've got the cuss so he can't move—bean him with that chair! No! no! don't use the gun, you darned fool! We don't want any police in here. Swipe him one over the head. Oh, hell! did you ever see such a mutt. Say, this is the guy I told you about, the fellow who was with the girl—quick now; soak him one!"

Realizing Wine was back of me, I managed to whirl the big bulk of the battling Russian about so as to block any surprise attack from the rear. This movement gave me the support of the wall, and, using it as a defense, I resorted to the same tactic adopted by Waldron, assaulting him with feet as well as hands, breaking his strangle hold on my throat and forcing him backward, so that a swift kick sent the fellow stumbling over a pile of books, clawing at the empty air for support. He would have gone sprawling upon his back if Wine had not been directly in the way. As it was, he struck the other, the force of his

big body hurling the smaller man heavily against the ledge of the outer window. As the fellow struck the glass shivered and crashed into a thousand pieces, but before Waldron could regain firm footing, or realize what had happened, I was again upon him, breaking through his dazed guard and driving my fists straight into his face.

The revolver in Wine's hand was discharged, the bullet whistling past me, but even as the report cracked, the pressure of the Jew's body forced the smaller man relentlessly backward over the sill. He gave utterance of one wild yell of fright, releasing the gun and gripping desperately at Waldron's collar for support, then toppled over backward and went down.

We both heard the crash as the splinters of glass gave way, and the dull, dead thud of the body as it struck somewhere far below. The Russian seemed paralyzed with horror, unable to quite comprehend what had occurred behind him. But I had seen the tragedy, and my mind worked like a flash. He made one weak effort to spring aside, forgetful of his own danger, his guard dropped, and I let him have it—straight in the jaw. The clinched fist crunched into his whiskers, and, with arms flung up, he went over as if shot, his head striking an edge of the overturned bookcase as he fell, and lay there motionless, a trickle of blood slowly oozing out upon the floor.

I stared down at the white upturned face, dazed myself at the sudden ending of the struggle. The fellow's limbs did not even twitch; one arm had fal-

len across the valise, as if even then he would hold the stolen money, but the only sign of remaining life was evidenced by a sobbing breath. I stepped back and leaned out through the broken window; three stories below, on a graveled roof, lay something black, huddled up grotesquely, which I knew was a human body, crushed shapeless, its bones broken. I drew back from the gruesome sight, so sickened I reeled dizzily, clutching at the sill for support. As I clung there, uncertain, dazed, my mind for the moment a blank, some one began rattling and pounding against the door leading into the corridor. The sound, coupled with a voice instantly demanding admittance, restored me to my senses. The noise of the struggle, the shot, the crash of glass, had evidently alarmed the other occupants of the building. I must face them, explain, tell my story in full.

I crossed the room, my limbs trembling so I could scarcely walk, my breaths coming in gasps. I caught a glimpse of my face in a small mirror, and stared blankly at the reflection, scarcely recognizing myself. The glare of lights in the corridor threw shadows on the glass of the door, showing many outside seeking entrance. They were kicking against the wood, and pounding with fists, seeking to break in the lock. The sight sobered me, brought back my self-control, and I threw the door open and faced them almost coolly. There were four policemen, the first a gray-mustached Sergeant, revolver in hand, and behind these a jam of excited individuals of both sexes, peering over shoulders to gain view within. The Sergeant

gripped me by the collar, thrust me to one side, and as instantly wheeled about to bar the way.

"Guard this door, Halsey and Morris," he ordered curtly. "Keep everybody out, except Carr and Kelly. Now you; what's up here? Have you killed somebody?"

"No," I answered, making no effort to break away, still breathing hard, but able to express myself clearly. "There is a man dead, but he fell from a window. I have nothing to conceal, Sergeant. My name is Severn, and I am connected with the United States Consular Service. Give me a chance, and I'll hand you my card."

He must have been impressed by the way I acted and spoke, for he released his grasp and accepted the card I fished out of a vest pocket, holding it up to the light in order to read the script.

"Philip Severn," he repeated slowly, his glance wandering again to my face. "You are a friend of Clement Breckenridge—is that right?"

"Why, yes," in surprise, "I have known him for some years."

"I thought so; I don't forget a face often, but never heard your name before. I was waiting at the bank to see Breckenridge a few days ago, when he came out with you from his private office. He seemed very friendly. Well, now, Mr. Severn, what's been takin' place in here? Some hot fight, hain't there?"

His tone was friendly enough, and it was quite evident that my acquaintance with the banker had already given me a new standing.

"This is the end of the Alva murder and robbery," I said directly; "one of the men is dead, the other lies in there senseless, while the money they were after is there also in a valise untouched."

"Good God! what money?"

"So you didn't know about that, even! Well, I'll tell you. Captain Alva was killed to gain possession of a large sum which had been paid him for revolutionary purposes in Chile. He was the authorized agent in this country for some conspirators down there, and London financiers remitted to him large sums. These fellows inside found out about such a payment having been made and waylaid him. They had to kill him in order to get the money."

"Who did it?"

"I am not quite sure, Sergeant, but I think Gaspar Wine committed the murder. He plunged from a window, and is lying dead down below there. The other fellow is still alive, and was going to share in the spoils. You know him, I guess, a Russian Jew by the name of Waldron."

"Evan Waldron, the Red orator?"

"That's the man. I'll tell you the story briefly; all that needs to be told now. I had reason to suspect these two, and hid in that closet, where I could overhear them discussing a division of the spoils. The two quarreled, and my presence was disclosed. A fight followed, during which Wine was forced out through the window. Then I got the best of Waldron, just as you fellows tried to break in."

The Sergeant looked about, plainly puzzled.

"I guess your word ought to be good, Mr. Severn," he admitted. "Seein' as who you are. You live in Washington?"

"Yes—officially; my home is in Ohio."

"Where yer stopping here?"

I told him, naming the hotel at which I was registered.

"All right then. I'll look around a bit; Morris, run down and call the patrol; have 'em get that body down out of there first thing when they come; Kelly, you stay here, with Halsey at the door."

I followed him and the fourth officer into the inner office. It was a wreck, but the Sergeant took the scene in at a glance and picked his way across to the shattered window. The other policeman bent over the outstretched figure of Waldron. The former stared down into the dusk below; then straightened up, and again faced the room.

"How is the cuss, Carr?"

"Alive, all right, but got a hell of a crack on the coco."

"Give him a glass of water in the face. Is this the grip you was telling me about, Mr. Severn?"

"Yes; it's locked, but supposed to be full of yellowbacks."

He pulled it forth from beneath the grasp of Waldron's arm.

"All right; I'll see it safe out o' here. I guess you'll have to go along with us, Mr. Severn; the captain will likely want ter ask some questions."

CHAPTER XXX: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

I TOLD my story to the Captain much more in detail, and Breckenridge being found, stood sponsor for my identity, so that I was not long detained. The next morning I testified before the coroner's jury over the crushed body of Wine, and later appeared in the room of the Grand Jury which indicted Waldron. On both these occasions I told enough to make matters reasonably clear, yet carefully avoided any direct mention of Miss Gessler. No doubt her name would be brought into the case later, but I was determined it should not be introduced through any indiscretion on my part. Krantz's name was used, but only indirectly, and the impression was left upon me that influence was being brought to bear to shield the banker from any direct connection with the crime.

I knew that when the time came for trial I could scarcely hope to escape thus easily. Under cross-examination by the defendant's attorney, the whole affair would be probed to the very bottom, and I should be compelled to disclose every bit of information I possessed. In the meanwhile I must discover the girl, and learn from her own lips, if possible, just how deeply she was involved. Then, and then only, could I decide upon my own future course. But how was I to locate her? I had nothing to guide me in

the search. There were only two people to whom I could turn for even a suggestion—Krantz the banker, and Sarah Waldron. I doubted if either would reveal the truth, but I could use the threat of exposure against Krantz, and might thus terrorize him into revealing the truth. Unquestionably he was aware of who Marie Gessler really was—probably he alone of that group possessed this exact information. She had dropped several hints which led me to this conclusion, convinced me that he was actually aware of who she was, and why she was engaged in this particular conspiracy.

I spent an entire evening in my room turning the whole matter over in my mind, after reading the brief newspaper report of the coroner's inquest, and decided that if the girl did not call me by phone before noon the next day I would certainly exhaust every effort to find her. She would assuredly learn by that time what had occurred, but, whether she so desired or not, I was not willing to let her drop out of my life. I would learn, at least, whatever Adolph Krantz knew about her.

The hours dragged away bringing no message, the silence merely strengthening my resolution and increasing my interest. After a lonely lunch, in which her face seemed ever before me, I took a taxi and drove direct to the bank. It was one of those dingy, solid stone structures on Wall Street, emblematic of strength and financial soundness, and once within its sacred portals I felt the natural awe which such institutions usually exercise over the ordinary deposi-

tor. Here everything spoke in terms of millions, and the great god Wealth was enthroned in state. I crossed the marble-floored lobby and approached a desk rather doubtfully. A middle-aged man glanced up from his work, and listened quietly to my question, examining my card attentively.

"Ah, yes, United States Consular Service—I see. I regret to say that Mr. Adolph Krantz is not in the bank to-day. In fact he is out of town, possibly for a week. Yes, he left rather suddenly for Washington. Perhaps you might care to talk with his Secretary."

I hesitated, yet almost as quickly decided to see what might develop.

"I will if you please, for just a moment."

"Very good, sir. The third door down that corridor to the left. You will find it ajar, I think; walk right in."

I proceeded as he directed, the glass partitions of the bank on one side, the other divided into small private offices, the equipment plainly handsome. The third door stood partly open, giving me a glimpse within before I ventured to enter. It was richly furnished, containing two solid mahogany desks, a typewriter stand, the machine covered; books lined the opposite wall, and a striking rug protected the floor. The place had far more the appearance of a private library than a downtown business office. A woman was bending over the further desk, busied at some work. I saw no other occupant, nor could I obtain anything but an unsubstantial glimpse at her. With

heart beating somewhat faster I ventured to open the door sufficiently wide to enter.

There was no one else present, but her head instantly lifted, and she rose to her feet, with a quick smile, and outstretched hand, coming directly toward me.

"Mr. Philip Severn, at last," she exclaimed pleasantly. "My faith is rewarded."

"Your faith," I echoed, rallying from my surprise at this greeting. "Then you were expecting me?"

"I have never felt a very serious doubt. Does that sound odd? Let me close the door, and then we will sit down and talk. I am never disturbed when the door is shut. Here is the best place. Yes, Mr. Severn, I was certain curiosity would cause you to seek me, even if there was no other motive. So, like a woman, I waited."

"Yes, but I possessed no knowledge to guide me."

"I let you know that I knew Mr. Krantz very well."

"Did you do that purposely?"

"I refuse to answer; still I will confess I left that door wide open, if you cared to use it. You did not expect to see me here, though; that was plain enough in your face. Then why did you come?"

"Because I wanted to find you," I confessed frankly. "To at least learn who you might be. I waited, believing you would phone me. Surely you heard what happened?"

"Oh, yes. I am not sure, but I may know even more than you do. But please go on; I did not phone, so you came here."

"I had but two choices—to seek information either through Adolph Krantz or Sarah Waldron. I chose to try Krantz first."

"And you really had no suspicion I was to be found here?"

"None whatever. Why should I? Not even yet do I know whom I am speaking with."

"Oh, yes, you do—Marie Gessler, revolutionist, messenger to the Chilean Junta." She laughed, her eyes sparkling. "Does not that satisfy?"

"Far from it; I believe I am entitled to even more."

"Indeed you are. I have the honor of being also private secretary to Mr. Adolph Krantz. Now what next?"

"Well, when he writes you a check, what name does he make it payable to?"

"Let me see; did you ever know any one called Tom Longdale?"

"Did I! Why, great Scott! you cannot mean that you are actually Helen? It is not possible."

"Oh, yes, it is; little girls grow up, you know. And now if you will be very good and quiet I am going to tell you just how it all happened. What led me to become a desperate conspirator, and—well, yes—a famous detective. Are you all ready for my confession?"

She rested her hand on mine, and permitted my fingers to close over it, in a spirit of frank good fellowship.

"Then listen; it may make you shudder in some of its blood-curdling details, and possibly you may con-

sider my actions very unwomanly. It has been a certain fear of your judgment which has kept me silent and mysterious so long. But now that it is all over, there is no other way except to explain everything frankly. I could not deceive any longer, if I wished to do so. Now just be quiet until I finish."

Her eyes met mine earnestly, but I felt I could perceive a certain pleading in their depths.

"I am Tom Longdale's sister Helen. As you doubtless know, financially there is no necessity for my seeking employment. Indeed I did not seek it, but was induced to accept this position at the request of Mr. Krantz, who has been a life-long friend of my father's. I enjoy the work, however, and have been here now nearly three years. Adolph Krantz is a most lovable man, and I am devoted to his service. He is an Austrian by birth, and has found it more or less difficult to get away from that influence. Much money from Europe passes through his hands in financing various schemes, and among others this revolutionary fund was intrusted to him. At first he accepted this in the ordinary course of business, without suspicioning its purpose, but later learned how the money was being expended. I knew little of this at the time, as it was all done secretly, and outside the bank, but the moment he became doubtful, Mr. Krantz absolutely severed all connections with these plotters and their schemes. While this was thoroughly understood officially, in Washington, where he reported his suspicion, certain circles, engaged in underhand work, still believed he could be used for their

purposes. The body controlled by Captain Alva was evidently one of these, who later decided to make him their financial agent. This group, while pretending to be entirely Chilean, is, in reality, a branch of International Revolutionaries, whose main object is the overturning of all existing forms of government. Their money comes largely from Bolshevik sources, and is seemingly unlimited. In this case it was doubtless sent in Adolph Krantz's name, before the leaders over there learned that he was no longer a safe emissary."

"Yet he accepted the trust?"

"In a way, yes; but with perfectly loyal intent. As soon as word secretly reached him that he was to be thus used, he laid the full facts before the officials of this bank. I was present as his Secretary, and learned then for the first time what I have already told you. They advised that he make the plot known immediately to the authorities at Washington. I accompanied him on that mission, and we then returned to New York to act under instructions. He was directed to accept the order, and thus, through seeming cooperation, learn the details of the plot, and the names of those directly connected with it. There was delay; for some reason Alva was not quite ready to go ahead, and refused to draw the money. Proof of conspiracy was lacking until this was consummated. Mr. Krantz, being afraid that he would be followed if he went again to Washington, delegated me to go, as I was entirely unknown. The Secret Service there outlined a plan designed to hurry matters. I was to be sent

direct to these men—Alva, in particular—with positive instructions from the higher powers in Washington to draw the money and get busy. I accepted, feeling that this was a duty to my country, and the necessary papers were carefully prepared, and I was given explicit instructions how to act. As I speak Spanish easily, and took the name of a well-known female revolutionist now in this country, but unknown even to Alva, the task did not seem a specially dangerous one."

She paused for a moment, her mind gathering up the odds and ends of narrative.

"It is not necessary that I go further into detail. I met Captain Alva as planned, and was taken to the place where his gang gathered. Krantz was there with the money, and my message compelled the Chilean to accept, and receipt for it. Government agents were stationed in Jersey City to intercept him on his way back to New York. He never got far enough to fall into their hands; before he had driven four blocks he was murdered and robbed. The rest of the story you already know."

"The money was actually in that valise, then?"

"Some money was, but not all. We were afraid it might be opened before an arrest could be made. Each package had real money on the outside; altogether the amount did not exceed fifteen hundred dollars, and these bills were all marked."

"But you suspected Wine? I know of your call at his office."

"I wondered if you did. Were you there then?"

"Yes, I followed you in."

"I wish I had known; I would have ventured more than I dared to alone. I suspected—yes; but that was all. I possessed no facts, but I frightened him so when I exhibited that hat-pin I felt absolutely convinced that he was guilty."

"You had no reason to believe he possessed such a weapon?"

"None whatever; I merely took a chance. I think now the pin used belonged to Sarah Waldron, but how it came there can only be determined through a confession by her husband."

Her eyes lifted again to mine, questioningly, and a bit anxious.

"Was my course right or wrong, Philip Severn?"

"Undoubtedly right, although I imagine few girls would have had the courage."

"You believe in me still? in the woman?"

My handclasp tightened, and her eyes dropped before the message she must have instantly read in mine.

"This has been a test of us both which we will never regret," I answered soberly, "for it has brought faith, hope, love; is this not true?"

She did not move, or glance up, but I caught the whispered response of her lips.

THE END